

*The* **TIGER** *that* **DABO SWINNEY BUILT**

*By* Brian Hamilton / P. 32

November 16, 2015 / **SI.COM**  
follow @SINOW

*"I was in  
a really  
dark place.  
Not wanting  
to be alive  
anymore."*

*"I look  
back now.  
I lived in  
a bubble  
for a  
long time."*

*The Rehabilitation of*  
**Michael Phelps**

*By* Tim Layden / P. 54

*This Season  
Count On A  
Good Excuse To  
Eat Too Much*

**AND KNOWING RIGHT WHEN  
YOUR PACKAGES ARRIVE.**

**INTRODUCING REAL-TIME DELIVERY NOTIFICATIONS\***



**THIS IS OUR SEASON®**

\*Available with select products. Most notifications transmitted within a few minutes of the delivery scan.  
©2015 United States Postal Service.® All Rights Reserved. The Eagle Logo is among the many trademarks of the U.S. Postal Service.®



# LINEUP

11.16.15

2015 | VOLUME 123 | NO. 19



## **+ ROARING SUCCESS**

Defensive tackle Christian Wilkins and Clemson silenced Florida State last Saturday 23-13 to remain unbeaten.

**PHOTOGRAPH BY:**  
David E. Klutho  
for Sports  
Illustrated

**SI HAS REGIONAL COVERS THIS WEEK:**  
Simon Bruty for SI (Michael Phelps); David E. Klutho for SI (Deshaun Watson)

## COLLEGE FOOTBALL

**32**

### **Dabo Swinney**

When not coining acronyms, Clemson's coach is building the nation's No. 1 team

By Brian Hamilton

**38**

### **Ezekiel Elliott**

The Ohio State running back has relied on many blockers to clear his path to stardom

By Pete Thamel

## PRO FOOTBALL

**46**

### **Colquitt Brothers**

The Peyton and Eli of punting have turned their dad's craft into a family business

By Austin Murphy

## BASEBALL

**50**

### **The Reiter 50**

SI ranks the top free agents and predicts where they'll land before next spring

By Ben Reiter

## OLYMPICS

**54**

### **Michael Phelps**

After coming to terms with himself, the swimmer's best days might lie ahead in Rio

By Tim Layden

## Departments

**2** **SI Digital**

**4** **Leading Off**

**10** **Inbox**

**14** **Scorecard**

**20** **Faces in the Crowd**

**21** **Just My Type**

*Dan Patrick:*  
Abby Wambach on retiring

**28** **The Comeback**

Bengals TE Tyler Eifert

**64** **Point After**

*Michael Rosenberg:*  
Let the funds begin

# Sports Illustrated



—  
**SI.COM**

FOR NOV. 16, 2015



# Death of a Goalie

This week marks the 30th anniversary of the death of Flyers goalie **Pelle Lindbergh**, who, at age 26, lost control of his Porsche 930 Turbo (*bottom, right*) and crashed into a wall outside an elementary school in Somerdale, N.J. At the time of the crash, his blood alcohol level was more than twice the state's legal limit. Lindbergh was coming off his best season in the NHL; he had 40 wins and was named the league's top goaltender. Go to [SI.com/nhl](http://SI.com/nhl) to read an essay by Brian Weitz, a longtime Flyers fan and the sound man for the band Animal Collective, as he reflects on the impact Lindbergh's death had on him as a kid growing up in Philadelphia.



BRUCE BENNETT STUDIOS/GETTY IMAGES (LINDBERGH); GEORGE WIDMANN/AP (CAR); DAMIAN STROHMEYER FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (ROBINSON); DON CAMPBELL/THE HERALD PALLADIUM (UZELAC)

SI.COM's

## Top Stories



### 1 You Don't Know Dabo

The colorful and charismatic Clemson coach (*page 32*) is the new king of football

### 2 Bud Bowl

The CEO of Anheuser-Busch had an idea that would forever change Super Bowl commercials

### 3 What Benton Harbor High Really Needed

For a roundup of last week's most popular stories on SI.com—including a feature on **Elliot Uzelac**, former assistant to Bill Belichick and Bo Schembechler, who led Benton Harbor (Mich.) High to a historic playoff victory—go to [SI.com/topstories](http://SI.com/topstories)

### 4 College Hoops' Most Interesting Man

There's a lot you don't know about eccentric Wisconsin junior Nigel Hayes

### 5 Should We Believe in Cam Newton?

As his game evolves, Superman may become truly super

SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

## Digital Bonus



### Hands On

From the SI Vault  
Jan. 29, 1990

Rookie **David Robinson** of the San Antonio Spurs is turning a lot of heads in the NBA with his extraordinary quickness and strength

By Jack McCallum

To read this and other stories from the *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED* archive, go to [SI.com/vault](http://SI.com/vault)

# THE FUTURE WON'T WAIT LET'S RETHINK HIGH SCHOOL.

Join the movement to reimagine High School  
and change the future of American education.

[XQsuperschool.org](http://XQsuperschool.org)  
[#RethinkHighSchool](https://twitter.com/RethinkHighSchool)











+

1  
of  
3**Leading  
Off**

## Home Stretch

■ Everyone who thought the Panthers would be undefeated halfway through their schedule, raise your hand! Quarterback Cam Newton was actually (and successfully) reaching for the end zone against the Packers on Sunday—though even he might not have predicted that Carolina would be this dominant. The Panthers moved to 8-0 with a 37-29 win in Charlotte, all but ensuring that the road through the NFC championship game will go through Bank of America Stadium. Which, as Green Bay now knows, is not a fun place to play: Carolina has won its last eight there.

PHOTOGRAPH BY  
**GRANT HALVERSON**  
GETTY IMAGES









+

23

**Leading  
Off**

## Red Dwarfed

■ An awful lot of momentum came to a crashing halt against the Alabama defense last Saturday: LSU's impeccable case for a spot in the College Football Playoff and Leonard Fournette's runaway case for the Heisman Trophy, to name two examples. The Crimson Tide rolled to a 30-16 win in Tuscaloosa and held Fournette, the nation's leading rusher, to 31 yards on 19 carries. Meanwhile, Bama, which began the weekend ranked No. 4, solidified its position as a CFP contender.

PHOTOGRAPH BY  
**JOHN BAZEMORE**  
AP









+

33

**Leading  
Off**

## Motion To Strike

■ This season has been a blur for Maryland, and not in a good way: The Terrapins' 31-24 loss at home to Wisconsin last Saturday dropped their record to 2-7 (0-5 in the Big Ten). But they did get some picturesque work from junior running back Wes Brown (with ball), who put Maryland up 7-0 in the first quarter on a seven-yard dash. Wisconsin rallied behind some special teams magic—a 98-yard kickoff return for a touchdown and a fake punt that gained 57 yards—to move to 8-2 and No. 23 in the AP poll.

PHOTOGRAPH BY  
**PATRICK SMITH**  
GETTY IMAGES

# INBOX

FOR NOV. 2, 2015



I got back from a jog in 25-mph winds, which wedged grit under my contact lenses. I took them out and put in eyedrops but was still in pain. Then I saw Steve Rushin's story on the Rugby World Cup (*Ruck & Roll*), and tears washed down my face as I read his hilarious, lively piece. Thank you for clearing up my problem naturally.

Rick Burns, Bend, Ore.

I enjoyed your article on the resurgent Owls (*No Trick, Just Treat*) but wanted to note that **Temple** won the Middle Atlantic Conference title in 1967. I should know; I played on the offensive line on that team. It is the only football conference title the school has won, but hopefully that won't be true after this great season.

Steve Caporiccio, Dover, Del.



It was wonderful to see Formula One in your issue (LEADING OFF), and **Lewis Hamilton** is a deserving champion. However, Andrew Lawrence's statement that "to rate among the very best, you have to win at least three world titles" ignores Jim Clark, who won only two before he was killed in a Formula Two race in Hockenheim, Germany, in 1968.

Beach Tredennick, Acton, Mass.



**CONTACT**  
SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

**Letters** E-mail SI at [letters@si.timeinc.com](mailto:letters@si.timeinc.com) or fax SI at 212-467-2417. Letters should include the writer's full name, address and home telephone number and may be edited for clarity and space. **Customer Service and Subscriptions** For 24/7 service, go to [si.com/customerservice](http://si.com/customerservice). Call 1-800-528-5000 or write to SI at P.O. Box 30602, Tampa, FL 33630-0602. To purchase reprints of SI covers, go to [SICovers.com](http://SICovers.com). **Advertising** For ad rates, an editorial calendar or a media kit, email SI at [SIpubqueries@timeinc.com](mailto:SIpubqueries@timeinc.com).



COVER

After Daniel Murphy appeared on my cover, he made key errors in Games 4 and 5, both Mets losses, and was an offensive nonfactor in the World Series. The Curse of the Billy Goat has nothing on SI's cover jinx.

Dave Pomeroy  
Las Vegas

PAGE  
24

## SCORECARD

Was this week's Sign of the Apocalypse Tokyo Sexwale's candidacy for FIFA president, or SI's making a joke out of an anti-apartheid activist, former political prisoner and successful businessman because of his name?

Kristin Hawes  
Seattle



I am not sure what was more fascinating about your story on e-sports (*Game of Throngs*): that competitive gaming is the nation's fastest growing sport or that few involved at even the highest level would know what **SPORTS ILLUSTRATED** is.

Andy Davis, Fanwood, N.J.

PAGE  
72



## POINT AFTER

**Michael Rosenberg** hit the nail on the head about revising the sports calendar, but I don't think Super Bowls should be in domes (like New Orleans's). They should be held in all weather. If corporate sponsors don't want to sit outside, let real fans attend.

David Marker  
Columbia, Md.



# Saving People Money Since 1936

**... that's before golf was on TV.**

GEICO has been serving up great car insurance and fantastic customer service for more than 75 years. Get a quote and see how much you could save today.

geico.com | 1-800-947-AUTO | local office

**GEICO®**



Some discounts, coverages, payment plans and features are not available in all states or all GEICO companies. GEICO is a registered service mark of Government Employees Insurance Company, Washington, D.C. 20076; a Berkshire Hathaway Inc. subsidiary. © 2015 GEICO

# RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

The holiday season means backyard football with family and friends. **MATT LEINART** has some thoughts on how to play the game right—and get to the dinner table in style.



»»» To read Matt's complete rules, go to [si.com/rulesofengagement](https://si.com/rulesofengagement)

© PHOTO BY JEFF KATZ PHOTOGRAPHY. PRODUCED BY ANASTASIA PLEASANT. STYLED BY MAT GIBILISCO/AUBRI BALK. ALL LOOKS BY DOCKERS®. GROOMING BY ISAAC PRADO/AIM ARTIST

**THANKSGIVING IS JUST DAYS AWAY.** Are you ready for the backyard football season? Matt Leinart is here to help. The former college and NFL star has a deft touch—as both a quarterback and style expert—that makes him the perfect guy to help you think through your own holiday football plans.

**DON'T BE AFRAID TO IMPROVISE.** It all starts in the backyard, pretending you're playing in the biggest game of your life. Growing up, we'd draw up plays on our chests or in the dirt. I'm 32, and I still love that stuff.

**FORGO THE FAMILY FEUDS.** I used to get crushed by my older brother, until I got a little bigger and more confident; now I whup him in everything, which is great! But you don't want to get *too* competitive.

**COMFORT IS KING.** What makes me feel good is a comfortable, casual look. Plus, that kind of style makes for an easy transition from the football game outside to dinner with turkey and stuffing.

**MAKE MEMORIES DURING THE HOLIDAYS.** When you have a kid, everything you do is just a great memory. But playing football during the holidays means the world when you're doing it with the people you love.

**SHOP THE LOOKS AT [DOCKERS.COM](https://dockers.com)**





YES, THEY'RE DOCKERS®



[DOCKERS.COM](http://DOCKERS.COM)

Dockers® is a registered trademark of Levi Strauss & Co.  
© 2015 Levi Strauss & Co.



Edited by JIM GORANT + TED KEITH

# SCORECARD

## Power Play

Missouri's football team showed the influence sports can wield on campus and in society. Will it lead to more athlete activism?

BY JOAN NIESEN



**ALL IT TOOK** was 32. At a school of 35,000, in a town of 115,000, among a sport that draws an audience of millions, not three dozen players stopped the world. On Saturday night 32 African-American players on Missouri's football team, in conjunction with a campus group, Concerned Student 1950, released a statement in response to a series of incidents and a climate of racial unrest this fall in Columbia. They offered the university a list of ultimatums—chief among them a call for system president Tim Wolfe's resignation—and said that they would cease all football-related activities until their demands were met. On Monday morning Wolfe resigned.

Missouri was off on Saturday after losing 31–13 to Mississippi State two days earlier. When the 32 players released their statement on Twitter, one of

the biggest games of the college football season thus far, Alabama versus LSU, was underway, and still the nation noticed. This handful of men, some teenagers, turned the national spotlight to their campus in a way no other 32 could have done.

The concept of organizing for change among college football teams is not a new one. Earlier this year the National Labor Relations Board dismissed a petition by Northwestern players who were attempting to unionize. In 2013, Grambling's team boycotted activities for a week to protest the firing of coach Doug Williams, long bus trips and inadequate facilities. Their actions forced the university to forfeit a game against Jackson State. But this, at Missouri, is different. It goes beyond football. This is not an outdated weight room or bad turf. It's a tug-of-war over racial equality.

### TEAM UNITY

Pinkel (right) let the world know early on that Mizzou's coaches supported the players' decision.

The players' stand was a response to a string of events that have unfolded in Columbia this fall. In September someone shouted racial epithets at Missouri student body president Payton Head, an African-American, on campus. In late October a swastika was smeared in feces on a campus building. On November 2nd, graduate student Jonathan Butler, frustrated by what he perceived to be a climate of racism and homophobia and a lack of concern from administrators, began a hunger strike. Cumulatively, it was too much, and as unrest simmered, players organized late last week, eventually drafting their ultimatum.

It was a move that could have fractured the Tigers. And though some players disagreed with the decision, the program publicly presented a unified face—





and that should come as no surprise. After all, the program is no stranger to embracing issues bigger than the game it plays. Less than two years ago Missouri was thrust into the spotlight when Michael Sam, a defensive end from 2009 to '13, announced he was gay. The team had known for years, and its support of Sam as he prepared to become the first openly gay NFL player was resounding. This is a program that bucks the tradition and conservatism that often go hand-in-hand with football. And so on Sunday, the team called a meeting, and at its conclusion, coach Gary Pinkel tweeted a photo of the majority of his players and staff. "The Mizzou Family stands as one," the tweet read. "We are united. We are behind our players."

What began as 32 players protesting against an establishment they perceived

to be out of touch had become a statement of solidarity between all the players and at least part of that establishment—the coaches. United they represent the moneymaking part, the front-facing part, the group Wolfe and the rest of Missouri's administration could least afford to ignore.

That's the thing about football: Affix it to a social issue and we pay attention. Richie Incognito. Greg Hardy. Adrian Peterson. So much of that focus, though, is negative, the spotlight a means of condemnation. We watch athletes hide behind their celebrity, and we rail against it. But Missouri's players catalyzed a different process. They are now synonymous with positive change, and they are a benchmark for other teams and other players seeking the courage to make their voices heard. "This should be a testament to athletes across the country: You do have power," says sophomore defensive end Charles Harris. Starting running back Russell Hansbrough, one of the original 32, tweeted this Saturday night: "Never thought I would be in place or time like this to actually make a difference."

What these athletes set in motion is about more than Tim Wolfe or the University of Missouri. It's about more than 100 young men from every corner of this country harnessing the power of the sport they're told to blindly serve. With Wolfe's resignation the Tigers will resume football activities and play their scheduled game on Saturday. But its outcome will not matter. They've already won. □

# GO FIGURE

# 31



Consecutive quarters in which the Patriots have scored, tying the NFL record held by the Rams (1999–2000) and the Colts (2005). The only period New England hasn't scored in this season was its first.



# 0

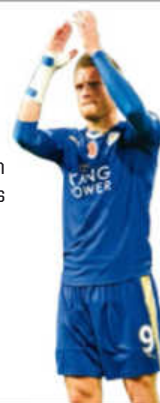
Points scored by the Bulls during the overtime period of a 102–93 loss to the Timberwolves last Saturday. It's the first time in the franchise's 50-year history that Chicago was held scoreless in an extra period.



Time, in seconds, of the shot clock used by Connecticut, the three-time defending women's national champion, and Vanguard, an NAIA team, during an exhibition on Sunday won by the Huskies 98–18. The teams also experimented by playing with the larger ball used in men's games, the international three-point line, a wider lane and an eight-second backcourt violation.

# 9

Consecutive games in which Leicester City's **Jaime Vardy** has had a goal, the most ever by an English-born player in the Premier League and one shy of the EPL record.



# Who Blew It Worse?

Blown calls have been regular occurrences in college football this season. Here's a rating based on one to five (worst) flags

BY JEREMY FUCHS



| GAME                                                  | BLOWN CALL /OUTCOME                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Miami vs. Duke, Oct. 31</b><br>                    | After Miami beat Duke 30-27 on an eight-lateral return as time expired, the ACC admitted that officials missed two calls: a Miami player's knee touching the ground that would have given the Blue Devils the win, and a block in the back that would have placed the ball at Miami's eight-yard line. The ACC suspended the refs ( <i>above</i> ) for two games. |
| <b>Michigan State vs. Nebraska, Nov. 7</b><br>        | With 17 seconds left in the game, Nebraska QB Tommy Armstrong threw a TD pass to receiver Brandon Reilly, who had stepped out-of-bounds before making the catch, to put the Huskers up 39-38. The refs ruled that Reilly was pushed out, which didn't appear to be the case in replays. The Big Ten said the force out was nonreviewable.                         |
| <b>Arizona State vs. Washington State, Nov. 7</b><br> | In the second quarter the Cougars appeared to come up short on a fourth-down try, but the refs ruled there had been an inadvertent whistle and replayed the down. On the second attempt, quarterback Luke Falk threw an 11-yard touchdown to receiver Dom Williams. WSU won 38-24, but the Pac-12 ruled the refs made an error.                                   |
| <b>Oklahoma State vs. Texas, Sept. 26</b><br>         | In a 30-27 loss to Oklahoma State, Texas defensive tackle Poona Ford got called for holding—except he was clearly held by Cowboys offensive lineman Victor Salako. Coach Charlie Strong protested with some light yelling and drew an unsportsmanlike conduct. The yardage tacked on by the two calls put OSU in position for a game-tying field goal.            |

## Name Game

Getting to know the new Boog Powell

### WHO HE IS

A 22-year-old OF prospect acquired by the Mariners from the Rays in a six-player trade last Thursday, the first notable move of baseball's off-season.

### WHO HE ISN'T

A relative of Boog Powell, the 1970 AL MVP and

a four-time All-Star for the Orioles.

### REAL NAME

Herschel Mack Powell IV. Got his nickname from his grandfather, who was a fan of the other Boog.

### GOOD BOOG

Named MVP of the 2014



Midwest League All-Star Game; has hit .308 in four minor league seasons.

### BAD BOOG

Served a 50-game ban after testing positive for an amphetamine in 2014; subpar defense and limited power (only six career HRs).

### FUTURE

Powell, who reached Triple A in 2015, should make his MLB debut next season.



## EXTRA MUSTARD



## SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE

The owner of the OHL's Flint Firebirds reportedly fired the coach because his son wasn't getting enough playing time. Then the whole team quit, including said son.

## LeBron's Shorts

He's trying to lead a move back to shorter shorts. Let's see Kobe do that.



HOT  
NOT



## Washington Nationals

MLB announced that it was recalling the 2016 Nationals team calendar. On the cover: Fenway Park.



## Film Room

Two movies blending health and football are headed for theaters. One pits a doctor against the NFL. The other tells the true story of a terminally ill college player. Here's how they stack up.



## CONCUSSION

(release date: Dec. 25)

—Ben Baskin

## Category

Will Smith deserves an Oscar nod for his portrayal of Dr. Bennet Omalu, who discovered CTE. David Morse is superb as late Steelers center Mike Webster.

## Acting

Smartly and boldly splices in real game footage for a powerful punch. But Luke Wilson is hard to take seriously as NFL commissioner Roger Goodell.

## Action

Stays true to the facts but takes creative license to make abstract ideas concrete, which could leave some viewers confused.

## Accuracy

Does an excellent job explaining what CTE is and how players get it, without being too complicated.

## Reel Science

## MY ALL AMERICAN

(release date: Nov. 13)

—Jacob Feldman

Aaron Eckhart, as Texas coach Darrell Royal, is the biggest name, but Finn Wittrock, as protagonist Freddie Steinmark, impresses most.

Football snobs shouldn't scoff at the gridiron scenes, filmed in stadiums around Texas with extras including former Longhorns QB Case McCoy.

Director Angelo Pizzo consulted with players from the 1969 Longhorns to ensure his final product could accurately be called a true story.

Steinmark, a safety, has Ewing's sarcoma, but there's little information about the disease that changed his life.

THEY  
SAID IT

"I'M JUST LOOKING FORWARD  
TO HOPPING ON THE WIFE."

## Bret Bielema

Arkansas coach's misstatement after his team defeated No. 18 Ole Miss 53-52 in overtime, which he quickly corrected to "hopping on a plane with my wife."





## Giant Return

Jason Pierre-Paul's three-month regimen to get back on the field

**IN LATE AUGUST,** strength coach Mike Alessi walked into Impact Sports Performance in Boca Raton, Fla., and saw Giants defensive end Jason Pierre-Paul crouched over his size-14 sneakers, using his right foot to hold a shoelace in place so he could tie it with his left hand. But by then Alessi was used to seeing JPP get creative in the gym.

The knot-tying routine was just one of the many adjustments the 26-year-old had to make after a Fourth of July fireworks accident

that caused the amputation of his right index finger and the tip of his right thumb while also severely damaging his middle finger. Alessi says every session since the incident had to be modified because Pierre-Paul couldn't hold weights with his right hand.

"For three to four weeks we only trained his left side," says Alessi. "Then we started manipulating things to get the right side working."

Alessi did that by wrapping an ankle strap around the wrist of Pierre-Paul's injured hand, allowing him to do rows, shoulder presses and other movements on the cable pulley machine. He also did various multidirectional footwork and running drills for agility and pulled a sled that was attached to his waist with a belt and harness.

After each workout Pierre-Paul met with occupational therapist

and hand-rehabilitation specialist Deborah Austin. "The ring and small fingers were just soft tissue injuries, so we were able to strengthen those," says Austin, adding that those two outer fingers are the key to grip strength. "When it was time to use the thumb and middle finger, we were ahead of the game." Because Pierre-Paul's position requires a lot of pushing, Austin incorporated wall and tabletop push-ups, and used other tools (*see box*) to increase upper-body flexibility and dexterity and to build strength. "[The surgeons] allowed Jason to be where he is today," Austin says. "He has a fully controlled hand."

Alessi agrees that Pierre-Paul looks "as good ever." On Sunday he played 47 snaps in New York's 32-18 win over the Bucs. Says Austin, "He exceeded all his goals in therapy, and then some." —*Jamie Lisanti*

During Pierre-Paul's rehabilitation, a specialist used a variety of tools to measure progress and help improve range of motion in his right hand.



### Soft Putty

This moldable substance changes colors as it gets hot, providing visual feedback during squeezing, stretching and pinching exercises.



### Hand Grippers

While a standard, two-prong tool works well, Pierre-Paul used hand exercisers that can work individual fingers.



### Pinch Pins

Similar to clothespins, these devices offer varying resistance levels to build strength and coordination.



### Basketball

Pierre-Paul dribbled and caught a basketball to apply impact to his hand, and shooting helped with wrist extension and flexion.

For more athlete training profiles and tips, go to [SI.com/edge](http://SI.com/edge)



GARMIN.



# beat yesterday.

vivosmart HR

Know when you're in the zone.  
Get the activity tracker with wrist-based heart rate.

Available at 

[LetsBeatYesterday.com](http://LetsBeatYesterday.com)

©2015 Garmin Ltd. or its subsidiaries



## YOUTH SPORTS

## Orange Badge Of Courage

■ **IN THE WAKE** of four incidents of gun violence that touched their New York City-based youth basketball program in the past year—including one that left a teammate with a bullet lodged in his back—members of the New Renaissance Basketball Association (RENS) are taking a stand. The program's 200 players, ranging from third to 11th grade, are wearing orange patches inspired by a movement meant to draw awareness to the epidemic of gun violence. They debuted their new look at a tournament in Queens last month with the help of former RENS player Mustapha Heron, a small forward at Sacred Heart High in Waterbury, Conn., who's headed to Auburn next year. Shootings have become so commonplace, they no longer raise eyebrows, he says. "You don't have to resort to gun violence to solve every problem you have." —A.F.



**Alyssa Aldridge** | *Linwood, N.J.* | *Cross-country*

Alyssa, a sophomore at Mainland Regional High, broke her own Atlantic County championships record, finishing the 5K Hammonton Lake Park course in 16:31.00, the third-best time in the nation through Sunday. A week later she won the Group III title in a course-record 17:52.55. Earlier this season she won the Brown Invitational in Warwick, R.I. [17:07.58].



**Duane Brown** | *Spring Church, Pa.* | *Football*

Duane, a junior running back at Apollo-Ridge High, set a Western Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic League record with 460 rushing yards on 47 carries and scored eight TDs in a 56-35 victory over Deer Lakes High. Last season he was named a Class A Eastern Conference defensive back and quarterback as well as the multipurpose player of the year.



**Brooklyn Hunter** | *Topeka, Kans.* | *Tennis, Volleyball*

Brooklyn, a freshman at Hayden Catholic High, beat defending state champ Sayaka Smith of Coffeyville High 6-2, 6-1 to win the 4A tennis title. A hitter on the volleyball team as well, Brooklyn helped the Wildcats defeat Concordia 25-13, 25-13 a week later in the 4A-Division II finals. She was named to the all-tournament team.

## FACES IN THE CROWD

Edited by ALEXANDRA FENWICK



**Brady Moore** | *Santa Barbara, Calif.* | *Water Polo*

Moore, a senior goalkeeper at Pacific, had 14 saves to lead the fourth-ranked Tigers to an 8-7 upset of USC. The victory moved Pacific into the Trojans' No. 2 spot in the national College Water Polo Association poll. At week's end Moore was averaging 11.60 saves and had a 6.76 goals-against average, which ranks third in the Mountain Pacific Sports Federation.



**Ainise Havili** | *Fort Worth* | *Volleyball*

Havili, a sophomore setter at Kansas, had 37 assists and a .625 hitting percentage to power a 3-0 sweep of Oklahoma, opening the season with a program-record 19-straight victories before falling to Texas. Through Sunday she was second in the nation in assists per set, with 12.24. Last year Havili set the Jayhawks' freshman assist record with 1,332.



**Justin Reyes** | *Haverhill, Mass.* | *Basketball*

Reyes, a 6' 4" sophomore forward at Division II St. Thomas Aquinas in Sparkill, N.Y., had 25 points and 12 rebounds—both game highs—in a 90-58 exhibition rout of St. John's, avenging a 97-71 loss to the Red Storm last season. As a freshman he was named East Coast Conference rookie of the year, averaging 11.1 points and a team-high 6.5 boards.

Nominate Now ▼





# JUST MY TYPE

→ Interview by **DAN PATRICK**

## DAN PATRICK:

*Is this an official retirement?*

**ABBY WAMBACH:** It's not happening until Dec. 16, but, yes, I'm retiring. I still have a few more games to celebrate with my fans and teammates. It's been an awesome ride. I'm so happy to be able to celebrate with my family.

**DP:** *Who did you tell first?*

**AW:** My wife, Sarah. I told her two months ago, right after the World Cup. I talked to my mom and my dad about it. They were really instrumental in making sure I made the right decision and was not being impulsive. I gave myself a couple of months and sat with it. It's the best decision for me. I did everything I set out to do. I'm lucky that I get to go out on my terms and on top.

**DP:** *Did you want someone to try to talk you out of it?*

**AW:** No. I'm not one of those people who can be talked into or out of much. I follow my heart in almost everything I do.

**DP:** *How many times have you been to the White House?*

**AW:** Probably four times. A couple of times as a champion and other times as a guest. Yesterday's visit [when the U.S. team was being honored for the World Cup championship] was really special. Not only does



ABBY WAMBACH

## STOPPAGE TIME

The 35-year-old forward is retiring after a 15-year career in which she scored 184 international goals [most of any male or female], and won two Olympic gold medals and the World Cup.

President Obama love sports, but he also really understands women's sports and how impactful they can be. What he said [about our inspiring girls to dream bigger] yesterday will go down as one of the best moments of my career.

**DP:** *Is it a must-laugh situation when around the President?*

**AW:** I thought about that.

It must kind of stink to be Obama because everybody laughs at your dumb jokes. It's the same thing with all celebrities. Everybody just laughs, but sometimes your jokes just aren't that funny.

**DP:** *He's going to realize he's not that funny when he's no longer president.*

**AW:** That's probably going to happen to me in the coming months. Nobody will be laughing at my jokes because I won't be a superstar soccer player anymore.

**DP:** *You'd be a natural at broadcasting. Any chance acting is in your future, maybe a superhero role like Ronda Rousey?*

**AW:** I don't know if acting is in my future. I'm not a great actress at all.

**DP:** *But soccer players act like they're hurt all the time.*

**AW:** Those are male soccer players. They always roll around as if they're injured.

**DP:** *Why don't women flop?*

**AW:** Probably the same reason women can have children. Like Obama said, we're all badass. □

## GUEST SHOTS SAY WHAT?

Saints quarterback

**Drew Brees** told me



that in his house, school spirit

outweighs family loyalty: "My sons go to [Isidore] Newman School in New Orleans, which is where [the Giants'] Eli Manning and Odell Beckham went," Brees said. "[When we played New York on Nov. 1] the boys decided to cheer for them."...



Cardinals defensive end **Calais Campbell**

explained how careful his team is during practice with quarterback Carson Palmer, who has had two left ACL surgeries: "I've seen guys get cut for getting too close and accidentally grazing him. Get off the field; someone else is



coming in."... Notre Dame

QB **DeShone Kizer** had an unlikely tutor as a kid. "I like to say that Donovan McNabb was my first quarterback coach," Kizer said. "My dad would pull up YouTube videos and teach me to do whatever McNabb was doing."

SPORTSMAN  
OF THE YEAR*The Case for . . .*  
**American  
Pharoah**

BY MARK BEECH

**IT DIDN'T** have to end this way. American Pharoah could have stopped racing after he won the Belmont Stakes on June 6, and he still would have been on the short list to be the first horse ever to win SPORTS ILLUSTRATED's Sportsman of the Year award. The 3-year-old thoroughbred colt had just won the first Triple Crown in 37 years—having swept the Kentucky Derby, the Preakness and the Belmont over five magical weeks in the spring—and in so doing had captivated a nation and ended decades of frustration in a sport that had begun to think it might never see his like again. He could have begun his lucrative career as a stallion on the highest of notes, with the roar of 90,000 fans still echoing around the rafters at Belmont Park. Out of racing and into history.

But thanks to his owner, Ahmed Zayat, and his trainer, Bob Baffert, American Pharoah kept running—and winning. On Aug. 2 he romped in the Haskell at Monmouth Park in New Jersey. On Aug. 29, in Saratoga, N.Y., he lost by three quarters of a length in the Travers, after getting cooked in a speed duel that left him empty in the final furlong. He returned on Oct. 31 and rolled to a 6½-length victory in the \$5 million Breeders' Cup Classic (the main event of racing's world



championships and the last major race of the year), at Keeneland in Lexington, Ky. He is the first horse to sweep the Triple Crown and also win the Breeders' Cup Classic. He went out in style, having done something no other racehorse ever had.

In the Classic, American Pharoah earned the winner's share of \$2,750,00, bringing his career earnings to \$8,650,300, the seventh-highest in history. His winnings, however, pale in comparison to what he is worth in the breeding shed. Last week Ashford Stud announced that it had set American Pharoah's stallion fee at a princely \$200,000 for a guaranteed live foal. (If the breeding fails to produce a baby, the stallion and the mare breed again for no fee.) The leading sire of 2014 was Tapit, who stands at Gainesway Farm in Lexington for \$300,000.

According to The Jockey Club, Tapit was bred to 164 mares last year. If American Pharoah covers that many in '16, he will bring in a very cool \$32,800,000. The lifespan of the average thoroughbred is 25 to 30 years. That's a lot of hay.

There was no other display of sportsmanship in 2015 that came close to what Zayat and Baffert did with American Pharoah. Horse racing is a dangerous sport, and all it would have taken was one bad step to turn his story into a tragedy—an unimaginably expensive tragedy. Zayat, who had sold Pharoah's breeding rights last winter for a reported \$9.8 million, plus an extra \$4 million for winning the Triple Crown, to Ireland-based Coolmore Stud, but who shrewdly retained control of the colt's racing career through the end of the year, insisted that he keep running because "our sport needs stars."

It fell to Baffert to not only keep American Pharoah racing, but also to keep him winning. The Triple Crown went unclaimed for 37 years in large part because it is a relic of another time. Horses today are bred to sprint, not to race the classic distances of the Triple Crown series. They also aren't trained to run so far three times in five weeks. Just as there is no precedent for what Pharoah accomplished in 2015, there is also no price that can be put on what Zayat and Baffert gave to sports fans.

American Pharoah wasn't perfect in 2015. But he won seven of his eight starts, including the most important races, and he won them with grit and joy and élan. And he was still running at the end. □

37

Years since  
a horse had  
last won the  
Triple Crown,  
until American  
Pharoah

\$8.65M

Career  
winnings  
for Pharoah,  
the seventh-  
highest  
total ever

1

Horse to win  
the Triple  
Crown and the  
Breeders' Cup  
Classic in the  
same year.



# JUST ASK

*Add gelato to  
my shopping list.*

*How is traffic?*

*What's on my  
calendar today?*

*Set a timer  
for 3 minutes.*

*Play my "New  
Artists" Playlist.*

*What's the  
news today?*

*What's the weather  
like this weekend?*

*Turn off the lights.*

Amazon Echo is designed around your voice. It's hands-free and always on to answer questions, play music, read the news and check sports scores, traffic, the weather and much more. [Just ask.](#)

INTRODUCING  
**amazon** echo





THE COMEBACK

## End Game

Tyler Eifert was always expected to shoulder the load in the Bengals' offense, but his dominance was delayed by a gruesome elbow injury. Now that he's back at full strength, Cincy's attack is the picture of health

BY ANDREW LAWRENCE

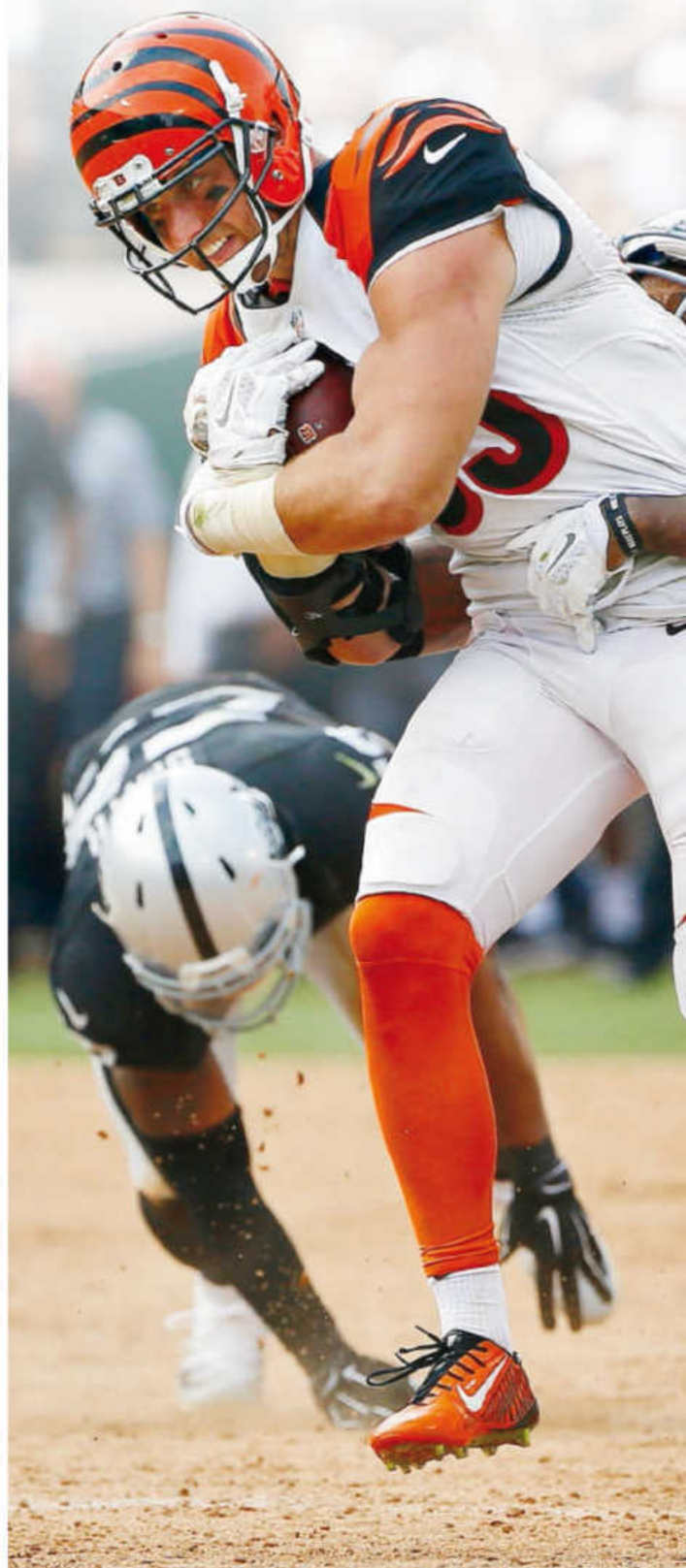
### WITH BARELY

11 minutes elapsed in the Bengals' 2014 opener against the Ravens, Tyler Eifert was on his way to the type of matchup-mayhem-creating game he'd been drafted for: two catches, 23 yards. The first one came against a cornerback who couldn't cover him, the second one against an outside linebacker who *definitely* couldn't cover him. Eifert's next grab, a nine-yard seam route off play-action, put Cincinnati in the red zone, but after fighting two safeties for a few extra feet, the tight end spun to the ground at the nine-yard line and came down hard on his right elbow. On TV the landing looked awkward. Up close it was something else. As Eifert writhed around on the turf, he clutched a joint that appeared to have caved into his arm. ("We're going

to spare you the replay," CBS's Spero Dedes told viewers, mercifully.) "Players on the field, they'd come up to me and be like, 'Oh, my God—ewww!'" says Eifert, who knew that meant "it can't be good."

Even so, Eifert assumed he'd reenter the game once doctors popped the joint back into place. But when he was still unable to bend his elbow past 90 degrees, he took the long, arduous walk to the locker room for X-rays—and that's when the pain *really* hit, to the point, he says, that he felt like "I was gonna puke."

Diagnosis: Beyond the dislocation, Eifert had torn his brachialis, the upper-arm muscle that flexes the elbow. "It was ground meat," says Eifert, meaning that surgery wouldn't fix him fast. "They couldn't really sew the muscle back together." The







TONY AVELAR/AP (LEFT); KELLEN MICHAH/ICON SPORTSWIRE

## WHAT A DRAG

Clingy defenders have proved no match for a healthy Eifert. Injuries have been the real foe.

best thing for him was a few months of rest, during which time the muscle would heal itself. So the Bengals placed him on injured reserve.

They did so reluctantly. Eifert, after all, was blossoming into exactly the player team brass imagined when Cincy selected him with the 21st pick in the 2013 draft two months after he helped Notre Dame reach the BCS title game. Truth be told, that pick was a controversial one, as the Bengals had needs at other positions and already employed two-time Pro Bowl end Jermaine Gresham. But Eifert would show enough promise as a rookie (39 catches, 445 yards, two TDs) for the team to let Gresham walk this past off-season.

If there was anything disconcerting about Eifert, it was his propensity for fluke injuries. Toward the end of his rookie season he suffered a right-shoulder stinger so severe that it immobilized half his body. He missed the following game. Then, in the run-up to the 2014 season a teammate fell on Eifert's left shoulder, tearing his labrum, as he was diving for a ball in practice. When Eifert aggravated that injury in the preseason, Cincinnati shut him down until Week 1.

And then he went down in a heap on the Bengals' third possession of the regular season, scuttling coordinator Hue Jackson's well-laid

plans to feature Eifert more prominently. "Oh, boy, it was tough," Jackson laments. "I keep saying our best coaching job was a year ago; we didn't have a lot of these pieces that we do now, but we were still able to put together a decent offense."

By decent he means: The Bengals won 10 games in 2014, with an average point differential of just +1.3, and tiptoed into the playoffs with offensive stats—348.0 yards per game; 39 scrimmage TDs—right around the NFL average. Not entirely surprisingly, Cincy bowed out in the wild-card round with a 26–10 loss to the Colts, the franchise's fourth one-and-done postseason in as many years.

All the while Eifert looked on—sometimes from a suite or the sideline at Paul Brown Stadium, other



The same player who could "push weights around" since high school couldn't even lift the bar.

**The first thing he benched in rehab: a hockey stick.**

times from home. "When the team was doing well, it was fun," he says. When they weren't, "you feel kinda helpless." Never mind that Eifert, in fact, *was* helpless. After arthroscopic surgery that November to remove scar tissue from his elbow, he went under the knife a second time, one month later, to patch up his other injury, the shoulder tear. The back-to-back procedures, which turned a half-season IR prognosis into a full-season shutdown, left him looking something like Lurch as he shuffled around the house of punter Kevin Huber.

**E**IFERT SPENT THE entire 2014 season renting a room from Huber, a seven-year veteran who's been known to board Bengals players, but their relationship wasn't strictly one of landlord and tenant. "We treated him like a child," says Huber, a close friend of Eifert's. "If he needed something, if he couldn't make the bed, we helped him." Huber and his fiancée, Mindi, kept Eifert's spirits up as his taut 6' 6", 250-pound frame withered to a "soft"—his word—235 pounds due to poor eating habits and a lack of exercise. Suddenly, the same player who could "push weights around" since his high school days in Fort Wayne, Ind., who was No. 3 at his position in bench-press reps (22) at the '13 combine, couldn't even lift the bar.

The first thing he benched in rehab: a hockey stick. "It was baby steps for sure," he says.

But hockey-stick presses soon became two-pound curls, which led to one-

armed excursions on the elliptical machine, and by the time of OTAs this spring Eifert was back on the field, running and swinging both arms. That is, until his elbow became sore and swelled up in August. “I got nervous,” he recalls. “Is something wrong? Did it not heal all the way? So I backed off for a couple days and put on an elbow brace. Ever since then, I’ve felt fine.”

He’s more than fine. Through eight games this season Eifert has operated with stunning efficiency, catching an NFL-high nine TDs—and that despite being targeted 17 fewer times than the next player on that list. Eifert’s 37 catches and 434 yards are likewise good for No. 2 among Bengals’ receivers in 2015, trailing only four-time Pro Bowl wideout A.J. Green. And if he keeps up his pace, he’ll be in the top two on Cincinnati’s single-season leader board for all three stats.

Eifert’s comeback has not only keyed an undefeated Bengals team that so far has boasted the league’s most balanced offense, but it has also turned Andy Dalton’s outfit damn near unstoppable in the red zone, where Cincy hits TD pay dirt 68.6% of the time, second best in the league. All nine of Eifert’s scores fall into that



#### IN THE ZONE

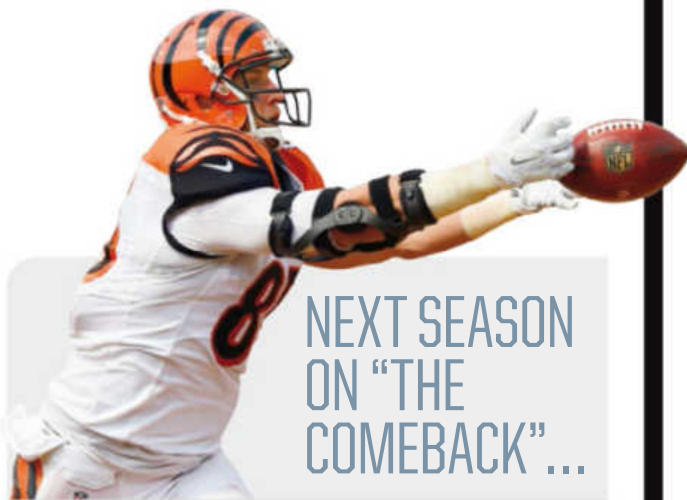
With Eifert’s elbow costing him all of 2014, Cincy ranked 11th in red zone scoring. In his two healthy seasons the Bengals have both times been No. 2.

category, suggesting that indeed he’s the matchup nightmare—big and tall, with great hands; not easily neutralized with a linebacker or a D-back—this team was looking for.

Even scarier: We ain’t seen nothing yet. “I kinda view this as his rookie season, because he hasn’t done much,” says Jackson. And Eifert shares that best-is-yet-to-come perspective. “[Rehab] was hard,” he says, “but I knew I had time. I’m young and I can recover from this.”

Where once Eifert hated seeing images of his injury, now he’ll Google them, show them off just for kicks. “Sometimes,” he says, “when I show people that picture, they’re like, ‘What’s wrong?’ And I’m like, ‘Look—it’s bending the wrong way!’”

And here he laughs. “It’s pretty badass if you think about it.” □



#### NEXT SEASON ON “THE COMEBACK”...

FOURTEEN PLAYERS, TOTALING 31 PRO BOWLS, WHO’VE ALREADY BEEN COUNTED OUT FOR THE REMAINDER OF 2015

| PLAYER          | Team / Position | Injury          |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| KELVIN BENJAMIN | Panthers / WR   | ACL             |
| JORDY NELSON    | Packers / WR    | ACL             |
| KEVIN WHITE     | Bears / WR      | Shin            |
| RYAN CLADY      | Broncos / OT    | ACL             |
| TERRELL SUGGS   | Ravens / LB     | Achilles        |
| DEANDRE LEVY    | Lions / LB      | Hip             |
| NATE SOLDER     | Patriots / OT   | Elbow           |
| JUSTIN TUCK     | Raiders / DE    | Pectoral muscle |
| ARIAN FOSTER    | Texans / RB     | Achilles        |
| JAMAAL CHARLES  | Chiefs / RB     | ACL             |
| CAMERON WAKE    | Dolphins / DE   | Achilles        |
| LE’VEON BELL    | Steelers / RB   | MCL             |
| STEVE SMITH     | Ravens / WR     | Achilles        |
| REGGIE BUSH     | 49ers / RB      | MCL             |

#### SI.COM

For more from Eifert on the lonely life of a recovering NFL player, check out the video at [SI.com/thecomeback](http://SI.com/thecomeback)





**NFL SHOP**

**NFLSHOP.COM**



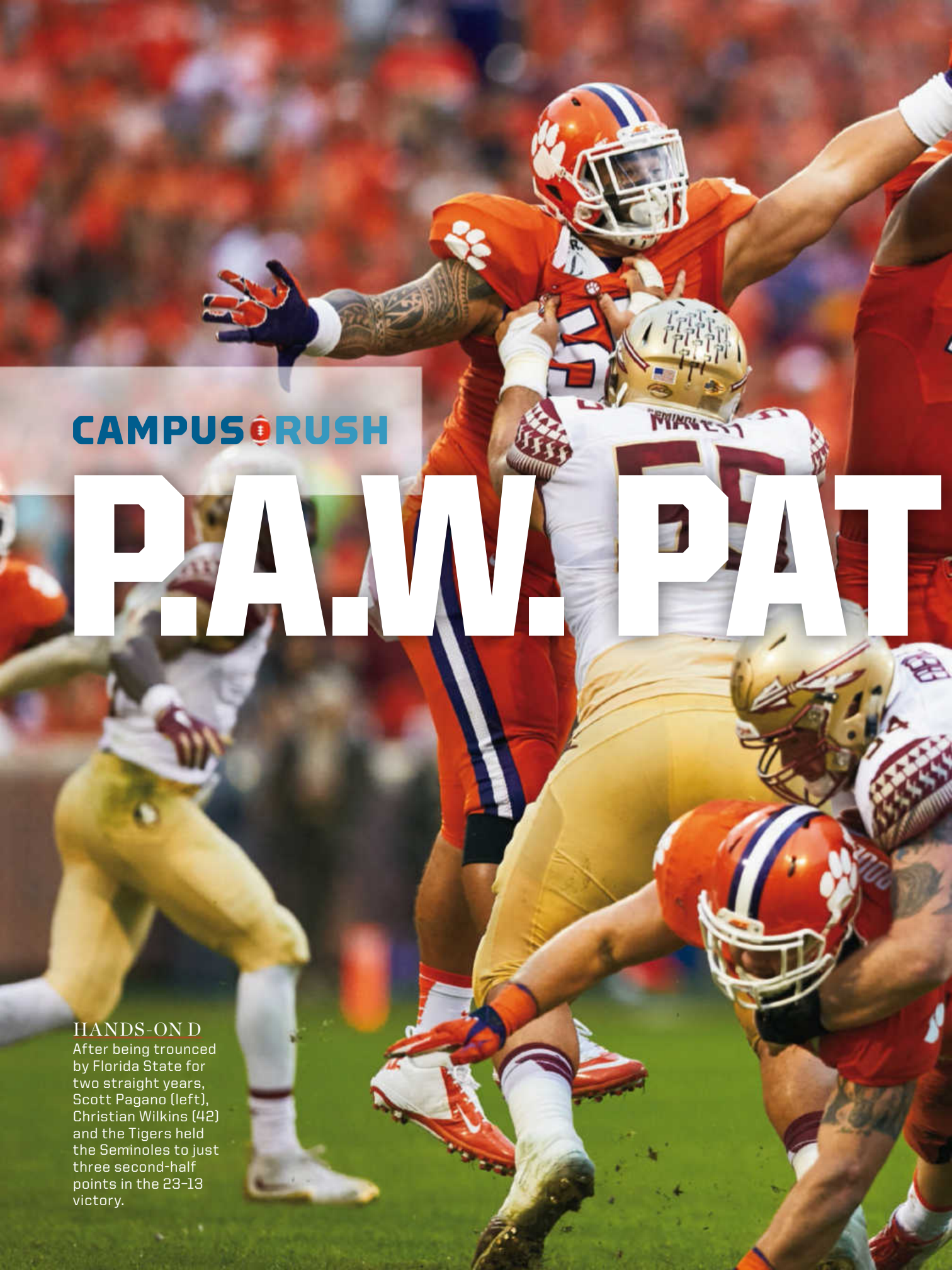
For the Andersons,

**FOOTBALL  
IS FAMILY**

Game day brings them together.

**Get your holiday orders in now  
for everyone on your list!**



A dynamic action shot from a college football game. In the center, a Clemson player in an orange jersey with the number 17 is being tackled by a Florida State player in a white jersey with the number 42. The Florida State player is wearing a gold helmet with "SEMINOLE" written on it. Another Clemson player in an orange jersey is visible in the foreground, also being tackled. The background is a blurred crowd of spectators in a stadium.

CAMPUS  RUSH

# P.A.W. PAT

## HANDS-ON D

After being trounced by Florida State for two straight years, Scott Pagano (left), Christian Wilkins (42) and the Tigers held the Seminoles to just three second-half points in the 23-13 victory.





# ROL

*WHEN  
HE ISN'T  
COINING  
ACRONYMS  
OR COAXING  
SMILES  
FROM BABIES,  
CLEMSON  
COACH DABO  
SWINNEY  
IS THE  
ARCHITECT  
OF THE  
NATION'S  
NO. 1 TEAM*

**BY BRIAN  
HAMILTON**

Photograph by  
David E. Klutho  
For Sports Illustrated



→ **HURRICANE JOAQUIN** is churning off the South Carolina coast, and storms that will soon bring historic flooding to the state are gathering. Still, a few hundred people venture to the Wren High football stadium on this gray Thursday evening. Everyone is here for a junior varsity showdown between Wren and Daniel High. Five dollars gets you in the door. Then you find your team's fans and cheer.

Midway through the second quarter the father of Daniel High's starting slot receiver climbs the steps on the visitor's side. He has come straight from work, calling his wife for an update on their son Drew during the half-hour drive from Clemson to Piedmont. He is wearing a gray warmup jacket, plus a cap emblazoned with a blue Daniel D. A familiar face catches his eye as he nears Kathleen.

"Boy, Phillips," Dabo Swinney says, "you made it all the way up these stairs?"

Jim Phillips was Swinney's trainer at Pelham (Ala.) High and is now a regular around these parts during football season. He laughs as Dabo smooches Kathleen, his wife of 21 years, before settling in. Dabo didn't think there was any way they'd play, because it was pouring in Clemson. That's where he coaches a college football team that will play one of its biggest home games ever in about 48 hours, a night that will go a long way toward determining its national championship fate. "So, Drew had a nice play?" Dabo asks Kathleen, who confirms that their 15-year-old middle son made a long reception up the sideline. Still, Daniel is losing by a couple of touchdowns as a kickoff lands in Drew's hands.

*Hit it*, his father says, nearly to himself. Then the ball pops out. A Wren player falls on it. Dabo drops his head in his hands. "Oh, my gosh, Drew," he says. "Aw, he's going to be sick."

Two nights later, in a cascade of rain, Clemson beat Notre Dame 24–22 in one of the most thrilling games of the 2015 season, establishing the program as a College Football Playoff contender. Afterward the Tigers' sopping coach yelled that the game was "B.Y.O.G.: Bring Your Own Guts," yet another colorful phrase from his ever-swelling archive. In the announcement of the initial CFP rankings a month later, his team—ranked 12th in the preseason—will be No. 1. Dabo Swinney will have plenty of opportunities to add acronyms to the football lexicon.

**W**ILLIAM CHRISTOPHER SWINNEY, known as Dabo—a derivation of That Boy, which is what his older brother, Tripp, called him—wanted to be a pediatrician like Edward Goldblatt, the only physician he would see for his first 26 years. "Whenever I saw Dr. Goldblatt, I usually didn't feel good, but he always made me feel better," Swinney says. "I just loved that. I wanted to do that."

But after taking 2½ years of premed classes at Alabama—and realizing it would take another seven years to become a doctor—Swinney's heart was no longer in it. Still, it wasn't until after he had won a 1992 national championship ring as a



*"I WANT TO BE THE BEST," SWINNEY SAYS, "BUT I WANT TO ENJOY THE WHOLE DEAL."*

walk-on receiver and after he became the first member of his family to earn a college degree (in commerce and business administration) that he figured out what he truly wanted. After a week of working as a Crimson Tide grad assistant, it hit him: He was happy. This was what he was supposed to do.

Some 22 years later Swinney sits in an office festooned with autographed footballs and life-sized cutouts of former players, reminders that his instincts were correct. After beating No. 17 Florida State 23–13 last Saturday, he has the 9–0 Tigers in position to win a national title for the first time since 1981—a breakthrough for a man who has always believed the best is yet to come, despite plenty of evidence to suggest it won't.

Dabo was the youngest of three boys. His mom, Carol, spent her first 11 years in a children's hospital, crippled by scoliosis and polio. His father, Ervil, battled alcoholism and was at times estranged from the family. Dabo became the rock of the household at a young age, playing three sports at Pelham High and cutting grass or cleaning gutters to bring in money. He and his mom stayed with a friend his senior year because they had been evicted







## ORANGE JUICED

Swinney won a national title with the Tide (bottom left, in red) and now has the Tigers on track to do the same.



from their home. Dabo's life was effectively contained in a storage shed. "You kind of have this facade of everything is all together, but your life is a complete disaster," Swinney says. "I mean, you're going home and sleeping on an egg crate on somebody's else's floor."

Swinney had been a wide receiver in high school, and after watching three Tide games as a freshman, he turned to Kathleen, whom he had known since first grade, and said, *I can do this*. He endured a walk-on weed-out program that involved 5:30 a.m. workouts in a heated gym three days a week in January and February—"It was just a throw-up routine, bottom line," he says—and became one of just two from the original group of 42 to earn a spot for spring practice in March. As a senior wideout he lettered on the national championship team. (Carol, struggling to make ends meet while working at Kmart and other retail stores, was living in his off-campus apartment at the time.) Swinney joined Gene Stallings's staff as a wide receivers and tight ends coach, and except for three years working in commercial real estate after he was let go in 2001, he has been on the sideline since.

At Clemson, Swinney was promoted from an assistant head coach to interim coach after Tommy Bowden resigned in October 2008, then landed the full-time job that December. The Tigers hadn't had a 10-win season since 1990 or an ACC title since '91, and they were far from a mortal lock in Death Valley. They have gone 50–11 since 2011 and 34–2 at home; only one player on the current roster, fifth-year senior receiver Charone Peake, has lost to a team that didn't finish in the Top 10. The Tigers have a Heisman candidate in 6' 2" sophomore quarterback Deshaun Watson, who threw for 297 yards and a touchdown against the Seminoles last Saturday, and the nation's fourth-ranked defense, which allowed just one TD.

It is no small thing to say that Clemson is at the top of the college football universe this season—but it could have reached that perch in other seasons this decade as well. There was an 8–0 start in 2011, followed by a 2–4 finish. Two years later the Tigers opened 6–0 before getting routed 51–14 by Florida State. Yet for all of the losses that might have twisted his perspective, Swinney has kept his approach the same. "We're going to have one of those special seasons," he says. "It's gonna happen. Maybe the ball bounces off the guy's head or whatever and lands in our arms and we run for a touchdown. We're going to have that year."

"Am I happy where the program is? You better believe it. Very, very happy. Am I satisfied? Not even close. I want to get to the top. I want to be the best. But I want to do it the right way and to enjoy the whole deal."

**I**N THE LOBBY on the west side of Memorial Stadium, a mural chronicling Swinney's tenure features nine pictures of him. He is smiling in every one. There is no Pensive Dabo or Intense Dabo. Just different iterations of Gleeful Dabo.

It's Wednesday—Family Night at Clemson. Coaches and their wives wheel strollers through the stadium's lobby and into the elevators, heading to the fourth floor, where kids wrestle and high-five Tigers players, who arrive to find a massive spread including fettuccine Alfredo, chicken cordon bleu and crab cakes with rémoulade—their training table having been moved upstairs. The team, the coaches and their families catch up while the stadium scoreboard glows in the background.

Swinney glides around the room and kisses an eight-week-old baby that his wife is holding, then points to a camera and tries to coax a smile. (He does not get one.) Just before walking out, he spots a little girl and makes at least three attempts at physical comedy to elicit a reaction. (He does not get one.) "The Coach Swinney y'all see is the Coach Swinney we see," says sophomore tailback Wayne Gallman, "pretty much all the time."

The Swinney everyone sees dances after victories. He doesn't really know what moves he made after a 20–17 win at Louisville on Sept. 17, calling it "a combination of the Whip and the Nae-Nae and the Stanky Leg and something called the Forks." The pantheon of Swinney acronyms includes, for starters, P.A.W. (Passionate About Winning) and A.L.L.I.N. (Attitude, Leadership, Legacy, Improvement, New Beginnings) and B.Y.O.E. (Bring Your Own Energy).

All this would be silly if it didn't work like a charm. How many times can teenagers hear coachspeak before it becomes white noise? During the week before the Tigers faced the Fighting Irish, Swinney saw a piece of grass growing amid cement steps at Memorial Stadium and fashioned a lecture around one of his favorite aphorisms: Bloom where you're planted. Do your best given your circumstances, no matter how challenging they are.

"Sometimes we make fun or pick at him for the things he does, but we wouldn't have it any other way," says fifth-year senior offensive lineman Eric Mac Lain. "We could be walking around on campus and we see someone pick up some trash, and we'll impersonate a Coach Swinney speech in front of the team, and everyone just dies laughing. It's funny, but at the end of the day, this guy can motivate anybody to get ready to play football."

Swinney can lose his smile at times. After the Tigers' 43-24 win over Georgia Tech on Oct. 10, a reporter asked how this team has been able to avoid "Clemsoning"—that is, stumbling against inferior opponents, as the Tigers have done in the past. That prompted a 51-second screed during which Swinney insisted the word be flushed from everyone's vocabulary. (Watching on TV, Mac Lain heard the query and cringed. "I was like, Aw, what poor soul said that to him?") Swinney kept his players on the field at halftime of a 58-0 win at Miami on Oct. 24, calling the setup that forced both teams to head to their locker rooms through the same tunnel "bush league." And Swinney's part in comedian John Oliver's epic anti-NCAA segment on *Last Week Tonight* in March remains memorable: Oliver highlighted Swinney's comments that players should not be paid for their efforts and then derisively noted the coach's name is an anagram for Soybean Wind.

"You have to be at peace with who you are," he says. "I'm not above reproach. I screw up. I don't claim to be perfect. So when people point out I'm imperfect, so what? That's just who I am. If that bothers somebody, I can't worry about that. I don't try to judge people. I just try to be who I am."

**L**ATE ON SUNDAYS, Swinney would pull out of the Clemson football offices in his truck and call his dad. "What you doing?" he would ask.

"Oh, I ain't doing nothing," Ervil would reply. "What you doing?"

"Aw, just riding home, checkin' on you," Dabo would say.

Ervil would offer an opinion on Clemson football, or Dabo would ask about the last game or the next opponent. When Ervil was diagnosed with lung cancer for the second time last summer, he moved in with Dabo for eight weeks of radiation and chemotherapy. The cancer, Dabo explains, was a blessing. If it wasn't for the disease, then father and son would have never had time to sit around in their pajamas and chat all night, or ride around town in the truck, or go see the boys play ball. Ervil was never happier. He'd remarried. He'd quit drinking. He'd quit smoking eight years ago, after the lung cancer first appeared. He'd taken charge of a life that was out of control for too long. Even as he fought the disease, Ervil was at peace.

### A.L.L.I.N.

Swinney can make a motivational phrase out of almost anything—and his players love him for it.



When the treatments were over, Ervil was back at M&M Hardware near Pelham, the store from which he ran a washer-and-dryer repair business, presiding behind the counter, solving all the world's problems right there. Then, on Aug. 8, Ervil died at 70. "Just quit breathing," Dabo says. His dad had recently seen the heart doctor and talked all the time about how good he felt. He was gone, just like that, leaving Dabo with just his mom, who had remarried and was still living in Alabama.

"Still got two or three voice mails I can't let go of," Dabo says. "I miss him. When you lose a parent, it's a strange feeling. It's a hard thing to get used to. I got all these pictures and voice mails from my dad, and it's like he's speaking to me from the grave. But I had great peace at his funeral because I know where he is. I know he is very happy. He was a fighter. He fought. I was just so proud of him."

**F**ROM HIS SEAT near the top of Wren High's stadium, Swinney laments the distance to the only open concession stand, across the field. Yet he is famished, having driven straight from practice. He is a God-fearing man, but he still falls prey to temptation. "Popcorn, pickle, get me



# A Big Chunk of Change

*Through Sunday, 10 FBS head coaches had been fired or announced they were resigning at season's end, seven of them from Power 5 conferences: Illinois, Maryland, Miami, Minnesota, South Carolina, USC and Virginia Tech. By the time the carousel stops, as many as 30 FBS programs could have openings. Here's who could fill some of the top spots.*

a Slim Jim, a Diet Coke," he says. "I love it."

He loves all of this, really, especially the balance. For years Swinney followed the same pregame routine with his team. On Friday nights he took the Tigers through game prep and then to the hotel. There, they had chapel and ate dinner. The last voice the players heard before going to their rooms was Swinney's, when he closed a Friday-night meeting with a motivational speech.

When his oldest son, Will, earned a spot as a receiver on the Daniel High varsity, Swinney called an audible. Now his meeting with the players occurs earlier on Fridays. Then the Tigers go to a movie, and chapel takes place on Saturdays. This allows Swinney to hustle out and be a dad in the stands. He tailors the job that pays him in excess of \$3 million a year to the rhythm of his sons' games. "It's what I do, it's not who I am," says Swinney, who also coaches his youngest son Clay's travel baseball team over about 10 weekends between March and June. "That's important. You can't let this job define you."

At the moment his job is to watch jayvee football and hope for a comeback. Momentum soon turns in Daniel's favor. A 55-yard touchdown sends a jolt through the visiting sideline. "There we go!" Swinney yells. "Bada boom, bada bing!" Daniel will score again to take the lead. Then, in the fourth quarter, the Lions begin a march to put away Wren.

With a little less than nine minutes to play and the ball at Wren's 20-yard line, a pass arcs high toward receiver Drew Swinney, sprinting along the near sideline.

Dabo's eyes track the ball and his boy. "Go get it!" he says. "Go get it!"

The pass lands in Drew's hands, and he crosses into the end zone. It's 30-21, Daniel. It is a dagger touchdown, effectively obliterating the confidence that Wren built early on.

"Boom!" Dabo yells, standing to punch the air. "Hot dog! A little out-and-up! Nice throw!"

**S**HORTLY AFTER being named Clemson's permanent coach, Swinney attended a lunch banquet in Spartanburg, S.C. He and several other coaches were to give five-minute speeches, but when Swinney found his seat, he couldn't believe it: He was next to Bill Curry, his first coach at Alabama, who was



## **MIAMI / Out Al Golden (fired)**

**Candidates** Greg Schiano, Rob Chudzinski, Mario Cristobal, Tom Herman, Charlie Strong

**Prediction** Schiano, now an ESPN analyst, is the safe play.

He was the Canes' defensive coordinator in 1999 and 2000, and he successfully recruited in South Florida while at Rutgers.



## **SOUTH CAROLINA / Out Steve Spurrier (resigned)**

**Candidates** Kirby Smart, Justin Fuente, Tom Herman

**Prediction** Smart has long been considered the heir to Nick Saban at Alabama, where he has served as

defensive coordinator for eight seasons. When Spurrier pondered stepping down last year, Smart topped the Gamecocks' list.



## **USC / Out Steve Sarkisian (fired)**

**Candidates** Clay Helton, Dan Mullen, Bill O'Brien, Kyle Whittingham

**Prediction** If interim coach Helton wins the Trojans'

remaining three games, embattled AD Pat Haden will give him a long look. If not, the opportunity might be attractive enough for Mullen to leave Mississippi State.



## **Virginia Tech / Out Frank Beamer (retiring)**

**Candidates** Rich Rodriguez, Justin Fuente, Tom Herman, Matt Rhule

**Prediction** AD Whit Babcock has known Rodriguez

since they worked at West Virginia in the 2000s. Rodriguez, who also played defensive back for the Mountaineers, would most likely leave Arizona for a chance to coach in the geographic region in which he's had his greatest success.

then the coach at Georgia State. Swinney wasn't sure if Curry would remember him. But Curry did, telling his former walk-on receiver how proud he was of the man he had become. Then, after some small talk, Curry cut to the chase.

"Dabo, you haven't asked for my advice," he said, "but I'm going to tell you three things."

Caught off-guard, Swinney scrambled for something to write on. He found a small piece of white paper and listened. Curry told him to find a good financial adviser, given the volatility of the profession. He told him never to sacrifice his family for the job; that, Curry said, was his biggest regret. But it was the very first piece of counsel that resonated most with Swinney.

The scrap of paper still sits near his desk in Memorial Stadium. The date is written in blue ink at the upper right corner: 12/19/08. To the left is the name "Bill Curry," underlined. And two words, scribbled next to a number 1 with a circle around it, have served as Swinney's guiding principle as he has struggled and soared.

"Be Dabo."

□

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

# THE ZEKE SQUAD







# OHIO STATE RUNNING BACK **EZEKIEL ELLIOTT** HAS RELIED ON MANY DIFFERENT BLOCKERS— ON THE FIELD AND OFF—TO CLEAR HIS PATH TO STARDOM

BY PETE THAMEL

Photograph by  
**Andrew J. Weber** for  
Sports Illustrated



**THE DEBATE** over Ezekiel Elliott's greatest hits rages throughout the Ohio State football offices. The candidates for the top tracks do not include his hurdling over a Western Michigan defensive back, or mocking so-called SEC speed while zooming past the Alabama secondary, or scoring any of his four touchdowns as the offensive MVP of the inaugural College Football Playoff title game. To the Buckeyes' staff, Elliott's greatest hits are actual *hits*.

Running backs coach Tony Alford presents his selections after dimming his office lights. He shows an otherwise forgettable fly sweep during a double-overtime victory at Penn State last season. Elliott is the lead blocker, and the 6-foot 225-pounder lowers his shoulder into safety Marcus Allen so hard that Alford exclaims, "Damn near breaks his femur!" The clips continue, with Ezekiel capsizing an Indiana safety 15 yards downfield on a four-yard run, then throwing not one but two key blocks on Braxton Miller's famous spin play in this year's opener against Virginia Tech. As senior right tackle Chase Farris says, "Zeke's violent *without* the ball in his hands."

When told of Alford's highlight reel later that day, Elliott nominates his personal favorite. Taking a break from his burrito bowl in the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, the junior grabs his smartphone and Google's "Ezekiel Elliott Purdue." The footage from a kickoff in 2013 shows Elliott sprinting down on coverage and crushing a returner with such brute force that he tumbles five yards out-of-bounds, stopping at the feet of the Boilermakers' cheerleaders. Elliott's eyes twinkle as he points out the final indignity: "There's a cheerleader," he says, "laughing at him on the sidelines."

These days No. 2 Ohio State and Elliott find themselves on a collision course with the College Football Playoff and the Heisman Trophy race with a couple of obstacles looming: 14th-ranked Michigan State (Nov. 21) and a trip to No. 15 Michigan (Nov. 28). Even among dueling quarterbacks J.T. Barrett and Cardale Jones and star junior defensive end Joey Bosa, Elliott has been the standout on the 9–0 Buckeyes. He has rushed for 1,244 yards at 6.4 per carry, scored 14 touchdowns and stretched his streak of 100-yard games to 14.

Elliott's 114 yards against Minnesota may have pushed him past LSU sophomore running back Leonard Fournette—who disappeared in a 30–16 loss at Alabama (31 yards on 19 carries)—in the Heisman race. As Elliott jockeys with Alabama tailback Derrick Henry, Stanford running back Christian McCaffrey and Baylor receiver Corey Coleman for the trophy, he's driven to

pay back those who've driven him—his offensive line (aka the Slobs), his tight-knit family and the OSU coaches, who rode him when the temptations of success lurked this off-season. “Eddie George told me the Heisman isn’t won in October,” Elliott says of the former Buckeyes tailback and 1995 winner. “It’s won in November.”

**E**VERY FOOTBALL play is a kind of synchronized violence. The one that changed everything for Elliott, Ohio State and the world order of college football—an outside zone read called Deuces Left Zin 99 Coke—looked as if it would amount to little more than a pileup at the line of scrimmage.

Clinging to a 34–28 lead in last year’s playoff semifinal against Alabama, the Buckeyes looked vulnerable. They had mustered only 25 yards on 17 plays in their previous four drives and faced first-and-10 from their own 15-yard line late in the fourth quarter. Elliott sprinted left after taking the handoff from Jones and saw a familiar collage of maroon defenders. “Trust your landmark and run through the smoke,” Elliott recalls telling himself. “It’s going to open up eventually.”

And so it did. Left guard Billy Price pulled in front of Elliott, sealing off the corner with tight end Nick Vannett. That opened a sliver of a hole for Elliott in the C gap, outside left tackle Taylor Decker. Then, as Elliott planted his left foot to turn upfield, wide receiver Evan Spencer cracked back on reserve linebacker Shaun Dion Hamilton with such force that he toppled to the ground and rolled into ’backer Trey DePriest, who also fell. Elliott sprinted untouched toward history. “It opened up like the Red Sea,” Elliott says, who wound up rushing for 230 yards. “It was me versus the field in a footrace, and it all happened so fast.”

The run proved decisive in a 42–35 upset of the top-seeded Crimson Tide, which kept the SEC from the title game for the first time since the 2005 season. The Buckeyes then defeated Oregon 42–20 to earn the Big Ten’s first national championship since Ohio State’s in ’02. “I’m getting chills,” Elliott says, flashing a jack-o’-lantern grin, “just thinking about it.”

Elliott was only an honorable-mention All–Big Ten selection in 2014, when he gained 1,182 yards on 197 carries in the regular season. But his life changed as fast as that hole opened up in the C gap. Three months later, when President Obama gave his crop-top number 15 jersey a shout-out at the White House, cellphone paparazzi began taking his picture at the grocery store, and teenage girls began shaking and crying upon meeting him. “That happens a lot,” he says with a guilty smile. The run turned Elliott into a star, a celebrity and a target. That’s why he relied on blockers to clear his path.

**A**S SIGNING DAY approached in the winter of 2013, Ohio State coach Urban Meyer watched Elliott play basketball for John Burroughs High in St. Louis. Meyer couldn’t decide what irritated him more that day, the vicious flu he’d been battling or the recent developments in Elliott’s recruitment.

Ezekiel’s father, Stacy, started as an outside linebacker from 1988 through ’91 at Missouri, where he met his wife, Dawn, who competed in the heptathlon.

### TRIPLE-DIGIT THREAT

Elliott, who averages 138.2 yards rushing, has gained 100 in 14 straight games.



**“I’M GETTING CHILLS JUST THINKING ABOUT IT,” SAYS ELLIOTT OF HIS 85-YARD TD AGAINST BAMA.**

Every year Ezekiel and his two sisters, Lailah, now 17, and Aaliyah, 10, attended Missouri’s spring game, which also serves a reunion for former players. Some of Ezekiel’s earliest memories are of running around Faurot Field postgame. Even after he verbally committed to Ohio State in April 2012—four months after Meyer’s return to coaching—the tug of Miz-zou lingered. Stacy kept peppering Meyer with questions about how he’d use Ezekiel, referring to an article sent to him by Iowa’s coaches that noted a Meyer team had never produced a 1,000-yard tailback.

Having already passed up other top rushers, Meyer grew increasingly upset as the one who had committed to the Buckeyes played indifferent hoops against pedestrian competition. “I’m sick as a dog and putting up with people questioning how we’re going to use him,” Meyer recalls. “I almost got up and walked out of the gym and said, ‘You guys go to Missouri.’” The Buckeyes’ running backs coach at the time, Stan Drayton, kept patting





Meyer on the leg, imploring him to hang in. “I’m really glad we didn’t leave,” Meyer says, mentioning that he still tweaks Zeke about his modest basketball skills.

Meyer’s trump card in keeping Elliott’s commitment proved to be Aaliyah. She liked Ohio State so much she chanted “O-H-I-O” at a Missouri football game, whispered “the Ohio State University” under her breath in Nebraska coach Bo Pelini’s office and put on a sour-milk face while reluctantly posing for a picture with Notre Dame coach Brian Kelly. When Meyer found out about her support he sent her a letter, helping to seal the deal. “I’m saying, Urban, where’d you come from, man?” Stacy says. “You just changed

the course of history for my family. Why? Why’d you have to come out of retirement?”

That Ezekiel became an FBS star wasn’t really a surprise—he piled up 3,061 all-purpose yards and scored 50 touchdowns as a senior. The real upset was that Stacy also moved to Columbus and evolved from Ohio State adversary to ambassador. “Our children are sheltered,” says Dawn, an account manager at an insurance company who stayed in suburban St. Louis with the girls while Stacy went to Ohio to look after his son in the summer of 2013. “You need to see Burroughs [High]. You walk in, and there’s backpacks all over the place [with no worry about anything getting stolen]. It’s not like that in the real world.”

Stacy found a job on Craigslist with the Columbus Urban League working with gangs, similar to the social work he’d done in St. Louis. Ezekiel admits he was initially skeptical of his dad’s presence but now appreciates the little things his father provides—getting the license plates for his 2014 Camaro convertible, picking up his cable box, retrieving his dry cleaning. Stacy’s there for tougher times, too, such as last December, when his son served as a pall-bearer at the funeral of Kosta Karageorge, a Buckeyes defensive lineman who took his own life. When Ezekiel had to deal with a stalker, Stacy was there to guide him and offer support. “People are drawn to him,” Stacy says. “It’s part of why I came here. A magnet can draw all types of things to it.”

Stacy has become such a trusted ally that Meyer has had him speak to the parents of incoming freshmen the past two years. The Elliotts have also spent the last two Thanksgivings with the Meyers; the coach says the only player whose family he’s become closer with is Tim Tebow’s. “The Meyers and the Elliotts,” Meyer says, “will be friends the rest of our lives.”

**T**HE UBER SUV idled outside the Hilton Anatole in Dallas after the national championship game last January. Elliott, fresh off blasting through Oregon for 246 yards, encountered greater resistance trying to get through the hotel lobby. As he and three friends pushed through the crowd, a Buckeyes fan in his mid-30s pursued them with a picture to sign. When Elliott refused, the fan hopped on the hood and slipped the photo through the driver’s window. He slid off as they left with the picture. “It was at that point,” says Alvarez Jackson, Elliott’s best friend, “where I’m like, Wow. It’s that serious.”

Some of Elliott’s most endearing qualities double as vulnerabilities. He’s never met a stranger, enjoys college nightlife and is known to wriggle his



## MESSY JUSTICE

The Buckeyes' O-line—aka the Slobs (left)—set Elliott straight after he was late for a workout.



hand like a fish between the ribs and inner arm of people as they're talking. (This is known as salmoning, and he looks to the Slobs with a mischievous grin for approval when he does it.)

Last February, Elliott drove alone to Nationwide Children's Hospital in downtown Columbus to visit a basketball player, Brooklyn Baldwin, whose high school career ended after a second ACL tear. He brought a teddy bear and an autographed *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED*, and stayed a half hour. "My family was absolutely shocked," says Baldwin, now a freshman at Wright State. For Elliott, the visit outweighed all the hassles of being a well-known Buckeye. "Who are we?" he says. "We run fast and jump high. To have an impact on someone's life means more than scoring a touchdown or holding up the national championship trophy."

On occasion, though, Elliott has been a bit too outgoing. Last year Drayton became concerned when internal reports said Elliott was missing classes and tutoring sessions. Elliott wasn't in danger of failing, but Drayton and Meyer decided to not start him in the Illinois game on Nov. 1. "From the day we met him," Drayton says, "Coach Meyer and I worried how he'd handle success. He's a social guy."

Once the coaches put Elliott into the game, he ran with an abandon they had never seen. He picked up 69 yards on nine carries, then 154 the next week at Michigan State. More important to Drayton, Elliott locked in academically and earned admittance to Ohio State's esteemed Fisher College of Business. "That's such a rare deal for an African-American football player," Drayton says. "We knew it could shape the rest of his life."

After the three-game postseason run to stardom—696 yards combined against Wisconsin, Alabama and Oregon—Elliott's excursions in Columbus turned into a social media bonanza. Elliott says he didn't go out more than he had previously, just that more people recognized him. Like many coaches, Meyer has spies tracking happy hour and last call, and the intelligence from the field led to three or four meetings with Elliott and his father, which Meyer admits "was probably me overreacting." Stacy recalls Meyer saying in one meeting, "I will not allow someone who is an excessive drinker to be a leader of this team. Ezekiel, you might be the best player I've ever coached, but you're not yet. Don't ever forget you got here because you're a grinder."

It became the job of strength coach Mickey Marotti to keep Elliott grounded. Outside the window of Ohio State's weight room is a picture

# SOME OF ELLIOTT'S MOST ENDEARING QUALITIES DOUBLE AS VULNERABILITIES.

from the 2015 ESPYs of Elliott, linebacker Joshua Perry and receiver Braxton Miller in suits. Marotti recalls the way entitlement and off-field issues had undermined Meyer's teams at Florida. "It makes me sick to my stomach," Marotti says of the ESPYs picture. "Because I know what happened down [in Gainesville]. I just—that little stuff bugs me, man." To keep all the Buckeyes, and especially Elliott, from the same fate, Marotti stayed "up his ass" every day.

His efforts were only partly successful, but the party ended abruptly for Elliott the morning after his 20th birthday in July, when he arrived 35 minutes late for an early-morning workout. The tailback offered a tearful apology to the coaching staff, but Marotti had seen enough, and he put Elliott in a workout group with the Slobs, who wouldn't tolerate any shenanigans. "I had a couple of hiccups," says Elliott. "That's when I realized it all has to stop." When camp rolled around in August, Marotti told Meyer, "Our Zeke is back. That other Zeke is gone."





Get stronger.  
**AT&T** has the network with the  
nation's **strongest** 4G LTE signal.

1.866.MOBILITY | [ATT.COM/network](http://ATT.COM/network) | Visit a Store

MOBILIZING  
YOUR  
WORLD™



Claim based ONLY on avg. 4G LTE signal strength for national carriers. LTE is a trademark of ETSI. 4G LTE not avail. everywhere. ©2015 AT&T Intellectual Property. All rights reserved. AT&T, the Globe logo, and Mobilizing Your World are trademarks of AT&T Intellectual Property.



# Sports Illustrated OVERTIME

FOR MORE SI EVENTS AND PROMOTIONS FOLLOW @SI\_OVERTIME



## POWERING THE FUTURE OF TEXAS FOOTBALL

On October 17, SPORTS ILLUSTRATED and Ford Trucks once again brought SI NOW on the road, this time for a first-ever Build for the Future event at the St. Philip's School and Community Center in Dallas.

More than 150 volunteers came out to refurbish the Saints' football field with a fleet of Ford F-150s helping to hoist a new scoreboard and goal posts, haul in new bleachers and concession stands and perform general field repair and landscaping. Clean-up crews included members of the neighboring Cedar Hill High School football team, as well as NFL greats past and present: Hall of Famer Randy White, TCU grad LaDainian Tomlinson and current Dallas Cowboys Cole Beasley, Sean Lee, Darren McFadden, and Terrance Williams. The Pro Players Foundation was also on hand, setting up an indoor activity area for young children.

The exciting day concluded with a friendly scrimmage on the new field, preceded by a ceremonial ribbon cutting and remarks by SI NOW host Maggie Gray and Ford Dallas regional sales and marketing manager Greg Wood, alongside St. Philip's athletic director and football coach Eddie Fletcher and school board chairman David C. Saustad.

SI NOW Powered by Ford airs live weekdays at 1pm EST at [SI.com/sinow](http://SI.com/sinow) and the SI.com home page. A special episode dedicated to Texas football, including coverage from this special Build for the Future Day, is slated to air on Monday, November 30.



1



2



4



6



3



5

1. COLE BEASLEY, COWBOYS WR, AND DARREN MCFADDEN, COWBOYS RB, WITH MEMBERS OF THE CEDAR HILL HIGH SCHOOL LONGHORNS FOOTBALL TEAM

2. COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS SHARE A LAUGH

3. THE FORD F-150 HELPING TO BUILD FOR THE FUTURE

4. MEMBERS OF THE ST. PHILIP'S SAINTS TAKE THE FIELD

5. FORD DALLAS REGIONAL SALES AND MARKETING MANAGER GREG WOOD (F), NFL HALL OF FAMER RANDY WHITE (B) HELP DEDICATE THE NEW FIELD

6. TERRANCE WILLIAMS, COWBOYS WR, PITCHES IN

ALL PHOTOS (OTHER THAN #3) BY PRETTY INSTANT PHOTOGRAPHY



# The Play-in Games

*These 11 matchups will decide who makes the final four*

## WEEK 11

### Alabama at Mississippi State

With one loss Bama is vulnerable, and the Bulldogs (7-2) would love to get revenge after the Tide ended their undefeated season last year.

### Oklahoma at Baylor

Baylor freshman QB **Jarrett Stidham** (*below*) looked good in a 31-24 win over Kansas State, but the Sooners' defense is tied for third nationally in yards allowed per pass attempt.



## WEEK 12

### Baylor at Oklahoma State

The Big 12 has no championship, so this could be for the league title and a playoff berth. Both offenses rank in the top seven in scoring, and both defenses are in the top eight in turnovers forced.

### Michigan State at Ohio State

A win in Columbus could help Sparty snatch the East Division title. Last year a Big Ten champ with a bad loss sneaked into the Playoff.

**UCLA at Utah** / The one-loss Utes could still work their way into the top four by winning out.

The Bruins (7-2) have Pac-12 title aspirations of their own.

## WEEK 13

**Iowa at Nebraska** / The Hawkeyes' road to 12-0 goes through Huskers QB Tommy Armstrong Jr., whose arm could challenge an Iowa secondary that's tied for seventh in yards allowed per pass.

**Baylor at TCU** / TCU's 49-29 loss at Oklahoma State last Saturday saps some of the anticipation, but if the Frogs beat Oklahoma and Baylor, they could still crash the playoff.

### Oklahoma at Oklahoma State

Oklahoma's perplexing 24-17 loss to Texas in Week 6 is the only black mark on its résumé, but wins over Baylor, TCU and the Cowboys to close the season could erase that.

### Ohio State at Michigan

The Buckeyes could be zeroing in on the Big Ten East title and a playoff berth. The Wolverines (7-2) might be in position to steal the crown. Urban Meyer vs. Jim Harbaugh, Round 1.

### Florida State at Florida

The Gators have clinched the SEC East, but FSU, which is out of the ACC title race, could stun its rival if sophomore back Dalvin Cook finds room to run.

### Notre Dame at Stanford

If both teams are 10-1, this could be a playoff play-in (though Stanford would have to win the Pac-12 title game too). The Irish's 24-22 loss at Clemson won't keep them out, especially after victories over Navy, USC and Temple.

—Colin Becht

**D**URING OHIO STATE'S bye week in late October, Elliott brought the five starting offensive linemen to Hyde Park, a tony Columbus steak house. They dined on 26-ounce rib eyes, devoured lobster mac and cheese, asparagus and garlic mashed potatoes. Only senior center Jacoby Boren didn't live up to the unit's nickname, drawing abuse for ordering a filet. The bill was not petit. "It was \$432.59," Elliott says. "It was worth every penny. I would do it again, but I have to save up." (Elliott says if he reaches New York City for the Heisman Trophy ceremony, he'd love to arrange for the linemen to come with him.)

There's a Last Supper feel to this two-year run at Ohio State, which entered the first CFP poll at No. 3. Less than a year after seizing the national spotlight by winning three postseason games as underdogs, the Buckeyes are staring at a program overhaul this winter. Entering this season, an NFL scout told SI that they could have as many as nine first-round picks and 15 players drafted. Now it looks as if five or six first-round picks will emerge out of the group that includes Elliott, Bosa, Decker, junior safety Vonn Bell, sophomore linebacker Darron Lee, junior receiver Michael Thomas and senior defensive tackle Adolphus Washington.

The Buckeyes signed the No. 2 recruiting class for 2016 and currently hold the top spot for '17, but the coaches know it will be tough to replace those true juniors—Elliott, Bosa, Lee and Bell—because their replacements haven't had as much time to mature. Elliott won't acknowledge NFL talk until the end of the season, but he's considered a mid-to-late first-rounder. "He can catch and block and is obviously a good runner," says an NFL scout. "He's a rare commodity, better than [Chargers rookie] Melvin Gordon because he's more versatile, bigger, stronger and probably faster."

The next few weeks will determine where Elliott ranks among the pantheon of great Ohio State running backs, as he's chasing Eddie George, Archie Griffin and Howard (Hopalong) Cassady. It's already November, and Elliott knows that the run to stardom can happen at any instant. □

# GOODWILL,

# PUNTING

THE PEYTON AND ELI OF  
PUNTING, **DUSTIN** AND  
**BRITTON COLQUITT** HAVE  
TURNED THEIR SUPER BOWL-  
WINNING DAD'S CRAFT  
INTO A FAMILY BUSINESS.  
LIKE MANY FAMILY  
BUSINESSES, THIS ONE'S  
HAD SOME UPS AND DOWNS

BY **AUSTIN  
MURPHY**

Photographs by  
**Jamie Schwaberow**  
and **Jeff Jacobsen** for  
Sports Illustrated

CARLOS M. SAAVEDRA FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (FOOTBALL); PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY SI/REMEDIA







→ **WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE, AND WHAT DO THEY HAVE AGAINST THIRD-DOWN CONVERSIONS?**

This question will be posed often by Mile High stadium spectators seated near members of the extended Colquitt family at Sunday's AFC West game between the Broncos and the Chiefs. Dustin Colquitt, a one-time Pro Bowler at age 33, is in his 11th year punting for Kansas City. His younger brother, 30-year-old Britton—who took a more circuitous route to the league—is in his sixth full season booming punts for Denver. And looking on from the stands will be Anne Colquitt and her ex-husband, the boys' father, Craig, who punted six seasons for the Steelers, between 1978 and '84, earning a pair of Super Bowl rings.

In his final season with Pittsburgh, Craig's base salary was \$95,000. Two years ago Britton signed a three-year, \$11.7 million extension that made him, at the time, the NFL's highest-paid punter. The guy he bumped from the top spot? His big brother, who quipped upon hearing the news, "Now he can start picking up some tabs."

He was joking. Mostly. When immaturity and alcohol addiction threatened to derail the younger Colquitt's career before it even started, it was Dustin and his wife, Christia, who took him in and kicked his butt—in a loving way—back onto a righteous path.

The most remarkable punting dynasty in history would never have taken flight, so to speak, if the Bearden High Bulldogs hadn't found themselves without a punter-kicker early in their 1999 season. It was then that Dustin was summoned from a classroom by Bill Young, coach of Bearden High, in Knoxville, Tenn. The team's specialist had broken his ankle. Could Dustin—a star soccer player who, despite his pedigree, had never played football—help out?

He'd practiced once before. But not for very long. After talking her son into giving the sport a try the previous spring, Anne arrived at the field to pick him up and found Dustin fuming. "Mom, I will *never* play football," he vowed. The problem? "These pants are *skintight*," hissed the self-conscious teen. He put an end to the football experiment that day.

... Only to revive it the following fall. When Dustin agreed to step into the breach, he had a fortnight to figure out how

to punt. Early reviews were not promising. Left-footed but righthanded, he pioneered the coyote-ugly technique of reaching across his body and placing the ball on his left foot with his right palm. “Son,” Craig fretted, “you’re gonna break your hand.” When Craig insisted that his progeny drop the ball lefthanded, Dustin objected: “I can’t even pick my nose with my left hand!”

To improve dexterity, he was soon juggling, eating and brushing his teeth as a southpaw. Late in that first game, with Bearden nursing a 16–14 lead, Dustin lined up to punt from the back of Bearden’s end zone. To Anne in the bleachers, Craig said, “What a way to start your career.”

The snap was good, the drop clean. The ball came off Dustin’s foot as if launched from Cape Canaveral. That 70-plus-yard punt helped the Bulldogs seal a victory and snagged the attention of coaches at nearby Tennessee, where his father had punted some three decades earlier.

**T**HE PATERFAMILIAS of America’s first family of punting didn’t go directly from high school to college. Craig Colquitt’s father, Lester, was a policeman, and higher education “wasn’t a thing in our family,” says Craig, who spent two years after high school working in Knoxville, first at Kern’s Bakery, then at Miller’s department store, shelving china. After Craig broke a number of plates and dishes, his manager at Miller’s handed him an ad from the local paper: The Vols were looking for a punter.

“I’m a two-step punter, had a 74-yard punt in high school, and never had one blocked,” Craig wrote to the Tennessee football office.

“I’ve never heard of a two-step punter,” special teams coach George Cafego wrote back. “But 74 yards intrigues me.” Craig was invited to try out and, soon after, to walk on. He started for three seasons in Knoxville. At a time when most punters took three steps and sought only to club the ball as far as they could, Colquitt took two, and—at the insistence of UT coach Johnny Majors—directed his punts. That is, he kicked the ball away from the returner, outside the numbers, toward the sideline. While not widespread at the time, it was a strategy favored by Chuck Noll, coach of the Steelers, who selected Colquitt in the third round of the 1978 draft.

Pittsburgh’s incumbent punter was Bobby Walden, a stolid southerner who drawled, upon meeting the 6’ 1”, 178-pound rookie, “You need to eat some corn bread an’ beans.” Colquitt beat him out and punted in the next two Super Bowls, both Steelers victories.



#### GETTING THE BOOT

Craig (above, at UT) passed his killer leg on to Dustin and Britton, who shared the field with him (top) in 2014.

Fearful he’d blown his last shot, Britton called his brother. “O.K., bud,” Dustin told him, “you’re coming to K.C., and you’re going to get it right.”



Between his second and third NFL seasons, Craig married Anne Davis, whom he’d met at Tennessee. An accomplished athlete herself (tennis, volleyball, track and swimming in high school), Anne also performed in the university’s contemporary dance company. To see her sons’ follow-through on a punt—both have jaw-dropping extension—is to be reminded that their athleticism and flexibility do not flow from just one parent.

**C**RAIG WAS standing in the Steelers’ locker room after a 1984 home game, holding the one-and-a-half-year-old Dustin, when father and son were approached by a cigar-smoking, white-haired eminence. “And who is *this*?” inquired team owner Art Rooney Sr. Having been introduced, the Chief summoned Craig and Dustin to his office where, out of footballs, he handed the toddler a baseball on which he’d written, DUSTIN—YOU WILL BE A SUPERSTAR SOMEDAY. ART ROONEY SR.

Growing up, Dustin did star—in every sport *but* football. At the kicking camps his old man put on every summer at Maryville College, 18 miles south of Knoxville, he preferred the swimming pool and the surrounding woods to whatever was taking place on the field.

Britton was different. Keenly interested in his father’s craft, he would dress up as Craig, in full Steelers uniform, for Halloween. So sound was his punting tech-





nique early on that, at football camp, his father used him as a model for the other boys.

Where her eldest son was “a pleaser,” Anne recalls, Britton had a fairly wide contrarian streak. He didn’t exactly throw himself at the Volunteers, even after his older brother was named an All-America at Tennessee. First Britton took unofficial visits to Georgia and Florida. Then the coaches at Marshall told him he’d start as a freshman, playing kicker and punter. The courtship had reached full boil by the time Craig finally called UT coach Phillip Fulmer. The following weekend Britton took his official visit. His apostasies—those visits to Athens and Gainesville—were forgiven. He committed on the spot.

Having arrived at Rocky Top with a technique far more polished than Dustin had, Britton made a smooth transition. On the field.

Off of it, he was a hot mess.

“When I [got to UT],” recalls the younger brother, “my name was known, even though I hadn’t done anything yet. I took advantage of that, a lot of times in the wrong way.” At least five times.

#### KICK IN THE PANTS

Up next, perhaps:  
Dustin’s nine-year-old son, Brinkley, who, like Dad, favors his left leg.



That we know of. In March 2004, as a redshirt freshman, he was suspended after his fourth alcohol-related incident in six months. Four years later he was arrested for DUI and leaving the scene of an accident. Of the latter incident, Dustin, who was selected by the Chiefs in the third round of the ’05 draft, says, “He could have called me. But he was fighting demons. He was thinking, ‘I’m bigger than this. I’m invincible.’”

This time Fulmer suspended Britton for the first five games of his senior season and stripped him of his scholarship. At that point Britton knew he wouldn’t be drafted. Many of the NFL scouts and coaches who’d kept an eye on him wrote him off.

But at least one didn’t. Dustin’s special teams coordinator

in K.C. from 2006 through ’08 was Mike Priefer, who’d spent some time around Britton and liked him.

In ’09, Priefer was with the Broncos, and he persuaded Denver’s brass to bring Britton into camp, red flags and all, and let him compete for the job against the veteran Brett Kern.

It was a close battle, won by Kern. Unemployed and fearful that he’d blown his only shot, Britton called his brother. Dustin did not ask him so much as he told him: “O.K., bud, you’re coming to Kansas City, and you’re going to get it right.”

**T**HE COLQUITTS have strong legs, and stronger faith. They recognize the Corinthians verse that ends, “when I became a man, I put away childish things.”

In 2009, Britton put away childish things—even as he spent most of his waking moments . . . with children. In those days Dustin and Christia had two kids, Brinkley, then age three, and Colston, who was one. (They now have five children.) The boys became Britton’s companions: He read books to them, drove them to play dates, changed their diapers. Rising early each morning—he slept on a mattress in the family’s unfinished basement—he joined his brother and sister-in-law in a daily devotional. When Dustin went to work, so did Britton, lifting weights at a local fitness center and kicking footballs at a nearby community college.

“Watching Dustin do it, day in, day out, I was learning how to be a pro,” says Britton. “But I was also learning what it was like to be a dad, have a family.” His girlfriend at the time, Nikki Hairrell, was teaching school in Memphis. “I knew she was the one,” he says. “But we weren’t engaged yet.” They were married in March 2011. Their third child is due in January.

Britton was happy and sober. At the same time, he was nagged by the fear that the NFL would never call again. But Dustin introduced his bro to “a really cool pastor” (Britton’s words), who guided him to this epiphany: If it wasn’t in the Almighty’s plan for Britton to punt in the NFL, he needed to accept that. It took him a few days, but he got there. Britton even wrote a letter to God. “I told Him I was O.K. with not playing football,” he says. “And as soon as I got to that point, it felt like a very real weight was lifted.”

From Dustin’s house, Britton drove a few miles into the countryside, where he spotted a large tree with a wide hollow in its trunk. He parked, walked across a field and put the letter in the hollow, as far down as it would go. “Then, I said, ‘O.K., we’re done here.’”

At 7:30 the next morning the Dolphins called, offering Britton a tryout. He made their practice squad. Eight days later, on Dec. 30, 2009, the Broncos signed him to their active roster.

In the cruel, Darwinian world of the NFL, where specialists seem to be a little more expendable than their teammates, the Colquitts are uncommonly secure in their jobs. Dustin’s average net punt this season is 43.2 yards, fourth-best in the NFL. He’s pinned foes inside their 20-yard line 17 times, fifth in the league. Britton is closer to the middle, averaging 40.0, with 12 punts inside the 20.

Numbers, of course, only tell part of the story. “What Dustin did for Britton,” says their old man, his eyes misting just a little, “is not measurable.” □

To see the full Reiter 50, with explanations of each pick, go to [SI.com/mlb](http://SI.com/mlb)



THE REITER 50

# HOT STOVE STARS

EACH OFF-SEASON, SI RANKS THE TOP FREE AGENTS AND PREDICTS WHERE THEY'LL LAND. LAST WEEK WE GAVE YOU THE FIRST 10. HERE'S THE REST OF THE BEST  
**BY BEN REITER**

THE  
TOP  
10

**1** DAVID PRICE  
LHP Age: 30\*

**2** ZACK GREINKE  
RHP AGE: 32

**3** JASON HEYWARD  
OF Age: 26

**4** YOENIS CESPEDES  
OF Age: 30

**5** JUSTIN UPTON  
OF AGE: 28

**6** JORDAN ZIMMERMANN  
RHP Age: 30

**7** CHRIS DAVIS  
1B Age: 30

**8** ALEX GORDON  
OF Age: 32

**9** MATT WIETERS  
C Age: 30

**10** JOHNNY CUETO  
RHP Age: 30

**11** MIKE LEAKE  
SP Age: 28

Current Team: Giants

Best Fit: Blue Jays

2015 Stats: 11-10, 3.70 ERA,  
1.16 WHIP, 5.6 K/9

**12** DEXTER FOWLER  
OF Age: 30

Current Team: Cubs

Best Fit: Cubs

2015 Stats: .250/.346/.411,  
17 HR, 46 RBI, 20 SB

**13** IAN DESMOND  
SS Age: 30

Current Team: Nationals

Best Fit: Padres

2015 Stats: .233/.290/.384,  
19 HR, 62 RBI, 13 SB

**14** WEI-YIN CHEN  
SP Age: 30

Current Team: Orioles

Best Fit: Dodgers

2015 Stats: 11-8, 3.34 ERA,  
1.22 WHIP, 7.2 K/9



**15** **MARCO ESTRADA**  
SP Age: 32

Current Team: Blue Jays  
Best Fit: Blue Jays  
2015 Stats: 13-8, 3.13 ERA,  
1.04 WHIP, 6.5 K/9

**16** **GERARDO PARRA**  
OF Age: 29

Current Team: Orioles  
Best Fit: Cardinals  
2015 Stats: .291/.328/.452,  
14 HR, 51 RBI, 14 SB

**17** **DANIEL MURPHY**  
2B Age: 31

Current Team: Mets  
Best Fit: Angels  
2015 Stats: .281/.322/.449,  
14 HR, 73 RBI, 2 SB

**18** **JEFF SAMARDZIJA**  
SP Age: 31

Current Team: White Sox  
Best Fit: Giants  
2015 Stats: 11-13, 4.96 ERA, 1.29 WHIP, 6.9 K/9  
Samardzija had a poor walk year, with his ERA jumping significantly from his 2011-14 average of 3.61. That was partially a product of Chicago's poor defense, but not entirely. His strikeout rate, an average of 8.8 per nine innings over the previous four seasons, plummeted as well, to 6.9. The good news is that the righthander threw pretty much as hard as ever; his fastball sat at 94 mph and scraped 98. Perhaps a change of scenery (and better fielders behind him) is all he needs. The Giants—whose rotation needs buttressing behind Madison Bumgarner, Matt Cain and Jake Peavy—could provide both.

**19** **BEN ZOBRIST**  
2B Age: 35

Current Team: Royals  
Best Fit: Dodgers  
2015 Stats: .276/.359/.450,  
13 HR, 56 RBI, 3 SB

**20** **SCOTT KAZMIR**  
SP Age: 32

Current Team: Astros  
Best Fit: Orioles  
2015 Stats: 7-11, 3.10 ERA,  
1.21 WHIP, 7.6 K/9

**21** **HOWIE KENDRICK**  
2B Age: 32

Current Team: Dodgers  
Best Fit: White Sox  
2015 Stats: .295/.336/.409,  
9 HR, 54 RBI, 6 SB

**22** **HISASHI IWAKUMA**  
SP Age: 35

Current Team: Mariners  
Best Fit: Tigers  
2015 Stats: 9-5, 3.54 ERA,  
1.06 WHIP, 7.7 K/9

**23** **DENARD SPAN**  
OF Age: 32

Current Team: Nationals  
Best Fit: Giants  
2015 Stats: .301/.365/.431,  
5 HR, 22 RBI, 11 SB

**25** **COLBY RASMUS**  
OF Age: 29

Current Team: Astros  
Best Fit: Padres  
2015 Stats: .238/.314/.475,  
25 HR, 61 RBI, 2 SB

**26** **JOHN LACKEY**  
SP Age: 37

Current Team: Cardinals  
Best Fit: Red Sox  
2015 Stats: 13-10, 2.77 ERA,  
1.21 WHIP, 7.2 K/9

**27** **STEVE PEARCE**  
OF Age: 33

Current Team: Orioles  
Best Fit: Orioles  
2015 Stats: .218/.289/.422,  
15 HR, 40 RBI, 1 SB

**28** **DARREN O'DAY**  
RP Age: 33

Current Team: Orioles  
Best Fit: Tigers  
2015 Stats: 6-2, 1.52 ERA,  
0.93 WHIP, 11.3 K/9, 6 SV

**29** **ASDRUBAL CABRERA**  
SS Age: 30

Current Team: Rays  
Best Fit: Twins  
2015 Stats: .265/.315/.430,  
15 HR, 58 RBI, 6 SB

**30** **IAN KENNEDY**  
SP Age: 31

Current Team: Padres  
Best Fit: Diamondbacks  
2015 Stats: 9-15, 4.28 ERA,  
1.30 WHIP, 9.3 K/9



**24** **JOAKIM SORIA**  
RP Age: 32

Current Team: Pirates  
Best Fit: Dodgers  
2015 Stats: 3-1, 2.53 ERA,  
1.09 WHIP, 8.5 K/9, 24 SV  
Soria began the season as the Tigers' closer and ended it as the setup man in Pittsburgh. He prospered in both roles and enters free agency as the most attractive available reliever. While he'd undoubtedly like to close again, the Dodgers, with their deep pocketbook and shallow bullpen, could give him closer money to set up for Kenley Jansen.

**31** **TYLER CLIPPARD**  
RP Age: 31

Current Team: Mets  
Best Fit: Mariners  
2015 Stats: 5-4, 2.92 ERA,  
1.13 WHIP, 8.1 K/9, 19 SV

**32** **BRETT ANDERSON**  
SP Age: 28

Current Team: Dodgers  
Best Fit: Mariners  
2015 Stats: 10-9, 3.69 ERA,  
1.33 WHIP, 5.8 K/9

**33** **AUSTIN JACKSON**  
OF Age: 29

Current Team: Cubs  
Best Fit: Royals  
2015 Stats: .267/.311/.385,  
9 HR, 48 RBI, 17 SB



**34** **RYAN MADSON**  
 RP Age: 35  
 Current Team: Royals  
 Best Fit: Blue Jays  
 2015 Stats: 1-2, 2.13 ERA,  
 0.96 WHIP, 8.2 K/9, 3 SV

**35** **ALEXEI RAMIREZ**  
 SS Age: 34  
 Current Team: White Sox  
 Best Fit: Mets  
 2015 Stats: .249/.285/.357,  
 10 HR, 62 RBI, 17 SB

**36** **YOVANI GALLARDO**  
 SP Age: 30  
 Current Team: Rangers  
 Best Fit: Pirates  
 2015 Stats: 13-11, 3.42 ERA,  
 1.42 WHIP, 5.9 K/9

**37** **MARLON BYRD**  
 OF Age: 38  
 Current Team: Giants  
 Best Fit: Rays  
 2015 Stats: .247/.290/.453,  
 23 HR, 73 RBI, 2 SB

**38** **DOUG FISTER**  
 SP Age: 32  
 Current Team: Nationals  
 Best Fit: Athletics  
 2015 Stats: 5-7, 4.19 ERA,  
 1.40 WHIP, 5.5 K/9

**39** **ANTONIO BASTARDO**  
 RP Age: 30  
 Current Team: Pirates  
 Best Fit: Mets  
 2015 Stats: 4-1, 2.98 ERA,  
 1.13 WHIP, 10.1 K/9, 1 SV

**40** **DAVID FREESE**  
 3B Age: 33  
 Current Team: Angels  
 Best Fit: Indians  
 2015 Stats: .257/.323/.420,  
 14 HR, 56 RBI, 1 SB

**41** **NORI AOKI**  
 OF Age: 34  
 Current Team: Giants  
 Best Fit: Nationals  
 2015 Stats: .287/.353/.380,  
 5 HR, 26 RBI, 14 SB

**42** **CHRIS YOUNG**  
 OF Age: 32  
 Current Team: Yankees  
 Best Fit: Yankees  
 2015 Stats: .252/.320/.453,  
 14 HR, 42 RBI, 3 SB

**43** **CHRIS YOUNG**  
 SP Age: 37  
 Current Team: Royals  
 Best Fit: Royals  
 2015 Stats: 11-6, 3.06 ERA,  
 1.09 WHIP, 6.1 K/9

**44** **RAJAI DAVIS**  
 OF Age: 35  
 Current Team: Tigers  
 Best Fit: Indians  
 2015 Stats: .258/.306/.440,  
 8 HR, 30 RBI, 18 SB

**45** **MIKE NAPOLI**  
 1B Age: 34  
 Current Team: Rangers  
 Best Fit: Orioles  
 2015 Stats: .224/.324/.410, 18 HR, 50 RBI, 3 SB  
 Napoli was terrible in 98 games with Boston (.207/.307/.386, 13 HR, 40 RBI), but a trade back to Texas, where he posted a .908 OPS, revitalized him. If the Orioles fail to re-sign Chris Davis, he'd make for a much cheaper replacement, and one who should prosper in the hitters' haven that is Oriole Park at Camden Yards.

**46** **TONY SIPP**  
 RP Age: 32  
 Current Team: Astros  
 Best Fit: Twins  
 2015 Stats: 3-4, 1.99 ERA,  
 1.03 WHIP, 10.3 K/9

**47** **ALEX AVILA**  
 C Age: 29  
 Current Team: Tigers  
 Best Fit: Angels  
 2015 Stats: .191/.339/.287,  
 4 HR, 13 RBI, 0 SB

**48** **J.A. HAPP**  
 SP Age: 33  
 Current Team: Pirates  
 Best Fit: Pirates  
 2015 Stats: 11-8, 3.61 ERA,  
 1.27 WHIP, 7.9 K/9

**49** **DOMONIC BROWN**  
 OF Age: 28  
 Current Team: N/A  
 Best Fit: Braves  
 2015 Stats: .228/.284/.349,  
 5 HR, 25 RBI, 3 SB



**50** **BARTOLO COLON**  
 SP Age: 43  
 Current Team: Mets  
 Best Fit: Mets  
 2015 Stats: 14-13, 4.16 ERA, 1.24 WHIP, 6.3 K/9  
 Now that LaTroy Hawkins has retired, Colon will be the game's oldest player. The results generated by his rubber arm earn him the last spot on this list over contenders such as Stephen Drew, John Jaso, Mat Latos, Colby Lewis, Tim Lincecum, Justin Morneau, Dioner Navarro, Alex Rios, Jimmy Rollins, Juan Uribe, Chase Utley and Will Venable. If Colon stays with the Mets, he could start until Zack Wheeler returns from Tommy John surgery, then act as a regular swingman thereafter.







Every Monday night football game this season, each quarterback sack supports the Boomer Esiason Foundation's Sacks for CF Scholarship Program.

## FANS CAN PARTICIPATE BY PLEDGING ANY DOLLAR AMOUNT TOWARDS EACH SACK.

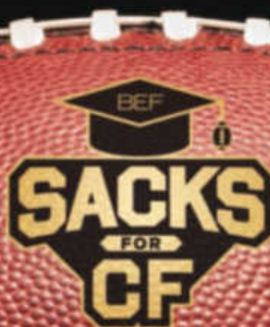
The Boomer Esiason Foundation's Sacks for CF Scholarship campaign annually awards scholarships to 30 college students who have cystic fibrosis in order for them to attend college. Students are selected based on their academic achievements and adherence to daily CF therapy. For information on applying for Sacks for CF Scholarship, visit [SacksForCF.com](http://SacksForCF.com).



**abbvie**

Thanks to AbbVie for making this scholarship possible.

**JOIN BOOMER. PLEDGE YOUR DONATION:**  
[pledgeit.org/sacksforcf](http://pledgeit.org/sacksforcf)



The Boomer Esiason Foundation is a dynamic partnership of leaders in the medical and business communities joining with a committed core of volunteers to heighten awareness, education, and quality of life for those affected by cystic fibrosis, while providing financial support to research aimed at finding a cure. The Sacks for CF campaign is powered by PLEDGE IT, a performance-based fundraising platform for teams and athletes. Find out more at [pledgeit.org](http://pledgeit.org).



# A New Man



FOR ALMOST FIVE DAYS in the fall of 2014, the most decorated Olympian in history lay curled in a fetal position in his Baltimore home, crestfallen and fearful, embarrassed at his behavior and uncertain of his future. Over three Olympics, from 2004 through '12, Michael Phelps had won 18 gold medals and 22 medals overall, each total more than anyone ever. His swimming had been transformed by NBC into a nightly television miniseries, and millions watched as Phelps splashed to victories for America over the rest of the world. His family watched at poolside, supporting players in an emotional drama that was the paradigm of Olympic success and Olympic packaging. His story had the perfect arc: In 2000 he was a prodigy; in '04 he was brilliant but imperfect; in '08 he was unbeatable; in '12 he was a legend on his farewell tour, diminished but still great. Three times he emerged a celebrity—each time a little more famous, a little more wealthy and a little more entrenched in the mythology of his quadrennial feats.

His life had been turned into a flat-screen American athletic dream: A skinny boy with big feet (and ears) had been transformed by endless laps and a wise coach into a red-white-and-blue, gold-medal-winning machine. Imagine our relief when he announced last spring that he would swim in one more Olympics next summer in Rio de Janeiro, his fifth (and surely his last?). Yet this was just half the story. Phelps was also an adult approaching 30, whose reality was approximating the two-dimensional cardboard cutout on all those television screens. That skinny boy had failed to find the same traction on land that came so naturally in the water. He had never come to terms with the father who was divorced from his caring and supportive mother when

*A year ago  
the best  
swimmer in  
Olympic  
history was  
lost. Now,  
after coming  
to terms  
with himself,  
the best of  
MICHAEL  
PHELPS  
might  
lie ahead*

BY TIM LAYDEN

Photograph by  
**Simon Bruty**  
For Sports Illustrated





Phelps was nine. He had found a woman to love and lost her. He had welcomed far too many sudden friends and had embraced the perks of affluence and celebrity more than was healthy. “I look back now,” says Phelps. “I lived in a bubble for a long time.”

Now that bubble was a prison of sorts. On the night of Monday, Sept. 29, 2014, Phelps drove from his home to the Horseshoe Casino near Baltimore’s harbor. At 1:40 a.m. he was stopped by an officer with the Maryland Transportation Authority while exiting the Fort McHenry Tunnel. Police had clocked Phelps’s white 2014 Range Rover at 84 mph in a 45-mph zone, and observed Phelps driving erratically. According to a police report obtained by *The Baltimore Sun*, Phelps failed two field-sobriety tests and a Breathalyzer put his blood-alcohol level at .14, above the state driving limit of .08. He was charged with DUI, excessive speed and crossing double lane lines. (Last December he pleaded guilty to a drunk driving charge.) A decade earlier, at age 19, shortly after the Athens Olympics, Phelps had pleaded guilty to driving while impaired; in ’09 he had been entangled in controversy (and suspended for three months by USA Swimming) after a British tabloid published a photo of him smoking a bong. This arrest was much bigger, not just because it was the third incident in a decade, but because the speed and level of intoxication made it more dangerous and hinted at larger problems.

Phelps’s mother, Debbie, who directs the Education Foundation of Baltimore County Public Schools, got the news at work in a call from Phelps’s agent, Peter Carlisle. “I just put my head on the desk,” says Debbie. “I thought, Oh, my God, here we go again. How terrible is the world going to be to my son?”

His father, Fred, who spent 28 years as a Maryland State Trooper before retiring from that position in 2003, works in commercial vehicle enforcement training. He got a call from a friend at the transportation authority who had seen the night’s arrest log. Cops take care of cops. “I asked if Michael was O.K.,” says Fred. “He said he was O.K. and then gave me the details, and I just thought, Oh, jeez.”

Brian Shea, a pharmaceutical sales representative and one of Michael’s best friends, was driving to a sales call when he got a text from his wife. “I pulled over and read the message, and I called my wife and said, ‘You’re kidding, right?’ ” says Shea. “I just slinked down in my seat right there next to the road. I felt so disappointed.”

Carlisle also phoned Bob Bowman, Phelps’s longtime coach. “I had been living in fear that I was going to get a call that something had happened,” says Bowman. “Honestly, I thought, the way he was going, he was going to kill himself. Not take his own life, but something like the DUI, but worse.”

Phelps apologized in a public statement. Friends and family gathered at Michael’s house: Debbie; sisters Hilary Phelps, 37, and Whitney Flick-

inger, 35; Carlisle; Shea; and several other longtime Baltimore friends, including former Ravens linebacker Ray Lewis, who had become friendly with Phelps several years earlier. (“He’s like a brother to me,” says Phelps.) Phelps’s girlfriend (now fiancée), Nicole Johnson, texted and called from California. Bowman was not there, but he also talked to Phelps on the phone. “He wouldn’t see me,” says Bowman. “He’s embarrassed when something like this happens.” Fred Phelps was not there; he

and Michael were not close at the time. Those who were in the house found a distraught Phelps, shaken at his poor judgment, terrified of its consequences. “It was bad,” says Shea. “It was every bit as bad as you would imagine. You could see he was feeling the weight of his actions. He knows he has kids who look up to him. He has his foundation. He knew he let people down, and he had no idea exactly what was going to happen.”

News organizations were camped nearby, looking for a glimpse of Phelps, who did not leave the town house for four days. “I was in a really dark place,” Phelps says. “Not wanting to be alive anymore.”

Phelps’s support team began to discuss the possibility of him checking into a treatment facility. To this day, no one close to Phelps will say that he has a drinking problem, although none dismiss the perils of drinking and driving. “He has a unique and challenging life, and he was clearly struggling,” says Carlisle. “This was an opportunity for him to finally learn some of the tools he needed to deal with that life.” The idea gathered support, though Phelps was unsure. Lewis was among those who pushed. “I gave him some harsh reality,” says Lewis. “I said, ‘Bro, what are you doing with your life?’ ” (Phelps says,







**SEA CHANGE**  
Since his 2014 legal problems (above), Phelps proposed to Johnson in March and excelled at nationals in August.

“He tore me a new one.” Bowman also pushed, in a phone conversation. “When I talked to him, he said, ‘I don’t think I can do this.’ I said to him, ‘You can do it, and you have to do it.’”

Gradually the vote became nearly unanimous, and Phelps began to embrace the idea. On the weekend following his arrest, Phelps flew on a chartered private jet from Baltimore to Wickenburg, Ariz., with Hilary and Johnson. They were picked up and taken to The Meadows, a residential treatment facility in the desert. “My brother was like a scared little boy on that trip,” says Hilary. Once there, the then 29-year-old hero of three Olympic Games was left alone, stripped of the personality that had publicly defined him. “Hug-hug, kiss-kiss, turn in my phone and go to my room,” says Phelps, “It’s probably the most afraid I’ve ever felt in my life.”

**I**T IS mid-morning in October at Arizona State University, and the autumn sun has already pushed the temperature into the low 90s, en route to 104°. Bowman stands in precious poolside shade, wearing a yellow Sun Devils T-shirt emblazoned with maroon pitchfork logos. He was named the school’s head coach of men’s and women’s swimming last April, and also brought—or was followed by—a postcollegiate training group of 13 swimmers. The most significant of these is Phelps, who climbs out of the water after a light swim. A more rigorous session will follow in the evening. He is bearded and deeply tanned, his skin pocked with baseball-sized welts left behind by cupping therapy, a suction-based practice that approximates rapid deep-tissue massage. It’s foolish to assess an athlete’s appearance; slow swimmers can look sensational on the blocks. But the rumors appear to be true: Phelps has a different profile—leaner and more muscular than in past Olympic years.

## Michael PHELPS

Phelps returned to training last fall after 45 days at The Meadows, and almost immediately the swimming world buzzed with talk of his workouts and renewed commitment. He trained hard and swam unevenly at several meets, and then in August, while most top U.S. swimmers raced in the world championships in Kazan, Russia, from which Phelps was barred under the terms of his suspension, he lit up the national championships in San Antonio. Phelps first won the 200-meter butterfly in 1:52.94, his fastest time since setting the world record in 2009. One night later, after South African Chad le Clos had won the 100-meter butterfly at worlds in 50.56 and dogged Phelps in a postrace interview—“I just did a time [Phelps] hasn’t done in four years. So he can be quiet now”—Phelps took the event in 50.45, also his fastest time in six years. Both butterfly times were Phelps’s fastest without wearing one of the high-tech, full-body racing suits that dominate the world-record lists and were banned in ’10. On the third night of the championships Phelps won the 200 individual medley in 1:54.75, his fastest time in four years. All three of Phelps’s swims were the fastest in the world in ’15, and all three would have won the world championship.

News of his performances rippled through the swimming community. Phelps has always been gifted: He made the 2000 Olympic team as a 15-year-old and at that same age became the youngest swimmer to set a world record. But his training had not always been consistent or disciplined. Days after leaving rehab, he told Carlisle, “Peter, it’s going to be interesting. I’ve never really given it everything I have.”

Bowman says Phelps did not miss a practice leading to the nationals this year, a streak that remains intact. Phelps publicly vowed not to

*“Hug-hug, kiss-kiss, turn in my phone and go to my room,” says Phelps.*  
**“IT’S PROBABLY THE MOST AFRAID I’VE EVER FELT IN MY LIFE.”**

drink alcohol at least until the Olympic Games are finished next August. After years of regularly gutting out workouts while hungover, Phelps is training clean. “Haven’t had a single sip and will not have a sip,” he says. “My body fat has dropped significantly, and I’m leaner than I’ve ever been. The performances were there because I worked, recovered, slept and took care of myself more than I ever had.”

Longtime coach Eddie Reese, who has been the head coach at Texas for 38 years and a head or assistant coach on seven Olympic teams, saw Phelps at the U.S. nationals. “You take the pluses of not drinking anymore and add his strength and physical maturation,” says Reese. “I think we’re going to see him go faster than he’s ever gone. Faster than [high-tech] suit times. He’s going to be very, very hard to beat.” Bowman, who has been watching Phelps’s workouts for two decades, concurs. “If we can continue like this until August, he will swim at this top level,” says Bowman. “He will swim his best times, and I think he will approach his [tech] suit times.”

This is all stunning. Phelps is likely to swim the same three individual events that he swam in San Antonio, although some in the swim com-

## Michael PHELPS

munity think he will add a freestyle event. (Says Bowman, despite Phelps's improved condition, "I don't think his fitness level would cause us to add another event." Which is not the same as saying no.) Sixteen years after his first Olympic appearance, Phelps will be a gold medal favorite in three individual events and, pending the state of U.S. relay teams (they struggled at the world championships), he could contend for three others, a span of excellence that is wildly unprecedented. "My sport is a numbers sport," says Phelps, the nerdiest of swim nerds, a walking database. "I have goals that I want to hit." He would become the oldest swimmer to win an individual gold medal (the current record holder is the legendary Duke Kahanamoku, who won a gold medal at age 30 in 1920) and the first to win individual gold medals 12 years apart. (Phelps is one of three swimmers to win gold medals eight years apart.) His medal record, already unimaginable, will become surreal.

And: That's the simplest part of this comeback story.

**P**HELPS EMERGES from practice in a T-shirt, Orioles throwback cap and floppy workout shorts. We walk two blocks to a Tempe breakfast eatery where Phelps stops at least three times a week, usually after weightlifting sessions. Not long ago the chef mixed up a batch of Cap'n Crunch French toast for Phelps and labeled it CAP'N PHELPS FRENCH TOAST on the chalkboard of daily specials. It sold out. Now Phelps orders three chicken sausage tacos and a pineapple upside-down pancake, with coffee and ice water. It's a hefty order, but decidedly less than the 4,000-calorie gut buster he used to eat—often with visiting journalists—at his favorite North Baltimore diner before the Beijing Olympics.

After spending his career in four-season climes—Baltimore and Ann Arbor, Mich.—Phelps has embraced Phoenix, where he lives with Johnson in a sprawling rented house in North Scottsdale, 30 minutes from the practice facility in Tempe. For the first time in his life, he will do most of his training—but for trips to Colorado Springs for altitude sessions—in an outdoor pool. "You have a different energy outside," says Phelps. "You finish swimming and look up, and it's a blue sky with no clouds. That's pretty amazing to me."

Like many U.S. journalists, I have passed in and out of Phelps's career—the *in* occurring around the Olympics. We talked three times at length before the 2004 Games, for a cover story in *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED*. The first of those interviews was in the late autumn of 2003, in a cluttered room over the pool at the North Baltimore Aquatic Club. At the time, I was 47 and Phelps was a shy 18-year-old. My teenage son suggested I engage Phelps by talking about *Halo*, a video game that had exploded into the market two years earlier. Phelps had brightened when I mentioned the game. "That game is so sick," he said. It gave us a little common ground and an awkward interview some momentum. I related the anecdote to Phelps. He laughed. "I was playing a lot of *Halo* back then," he says. It's instructive now to see the young boy somewhere deep inside the man, 12 years, 22 medals and thousands of interviews later. Much of the awkwardness is gone, although this is a recent development, the product of struggling and falling and of the lessons learned in those 45 days at The Meadows. "He seems more peaceful," says Hilary. "He was always a little irritated before, tense. He's letting



**GOLD MINE**  
Phelps broke through in Athens in 2004 (above) with six gold medals, dominated in Beijing with eight (center) and added four more in London in 2012 (far right).



things go now. I think that's what happens when you're stripped down to such a raw, painful place."

Phelps turns sideways at the breakfast counter. He has a story, and he would like to tell it.

**H**IS EIGHT gold medals in 2008, breaking Mark Spitz's revered 36-year-old record of seven golds, required Phelps to swim an astounding 17 races in nine days. Some were easy (his romp in the 400-meter IM) and some were not (the U.S. victory in the 4 × 100-meter freestyle relay, anchored by Jason Lezak's miraculous swim). But that week had been built on a 13-year foundation of Bowman's planning and Phelps's training. It would prove impossible to sustain for another four years. Phelps won five gold medals and set two individual world records at the '09 world championships in Rome, and two more individual golds (but also two silvers) at the '11 worlds in Shanghai. He was doing it on the fumes of his pre-Beijing training. "To be honest," says Bowman, "I was doing it with smoke and mirrors."

Says Phelps, "After '08, mentally, I was over. I didn't want to do it anymore. But I also knew I couldn't stop. So I forced myself to do something that I really didn't want to do, which was continue swimming. That whole four-year period, I would miss at least two workouts a week. Why? Didn't want to go. Didn't feel like going. Screw it. I'm going to sleep in. I'm going to skip Friday and go for a long weekend."

Shortly after Beijing, Bowman created what he called Friend Fridays, when Phelps's nonswimming friends





were invited to the pool, as an enticement to get Phelps to show up. Bowman would write workouts for everybody. Sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't. Shea says, "I told Michael, 'If I show up and you're not there, we've got a problem, because I am not a swimmer.'"



Phelps's discipline rose and fell during the year before the London Games, until an episode just a few months before the opening ceremony, 10 days before an Olympic media event in Dallas in May. "Michael was actually starting to do O.K.," says Bowman. "He had put together a couple good weeks of training, and I was thinking maybe this will be all right. We got back to Baltimore on a Monday, and we're doing a typical [lactate] threshold set and Michael and [training partner] Chase [Kalisz] touch almost at the same time—*bing, bing*. I just yelled out the same time for both of them. Michael yells, 'Are you going to time me or what?' I gave him [a separate] time and then he started swimming slowly, which is what he does to piss me off. I yelled at him, 'My timing has been good enough for the last 15 years.' We go at it. World War III. I smash my watch against the wall. We get into the parking lot, and I peel out and flip him the bird, and he flips me the bird. Well, he doesn't come back for 10 days. He finally shows up on Day 11 because Matt Lauer was in town to interview him for the *Today* show. They had no idea. That's what our preparation was like for London."

After that incident Bowman took Phelps to Colorado Springs for altitude training and stayed six weeks before the Olympic trials. "People thought it was a genius training plan," says Bowman. "The truth was it was the only way I could keep him at practice."

Phelps's first London event was the 400-meter individual medley, the most grueling of his four individual swims and the event in which his lack of training was most likely to be exposed. He finished fourth, as coun-

tryman Ryan Lochte won gold. "My mistake," says Bowman. "I got him to do the IM so I could get him enough training for the other events. It worked for the other events. I thought he would swim a s----- IM and finish second. He swam a s----- IM and finished fourth. I was an idiot." U.S. writers stuck a fork in Phelps's career. "Not often

do you witness, with your own eyes, an entire era coming to such a definitive and complete end," wrote Mark Purdy of the *San Jose Mercury News*.

Phelps won four gold medals before the Games were finished, but the race that he and Bowman remember best is the 200 butterfly, in which he lost by .05 of a second on the wall to Le Clos. "That was a freaking miracle by a guy who didn't train for that event for three years," says Bowman. "No one else in history could reach down like that, at that moment, and get to the point where he could get outtouched by five hundredths." Or as Lochte



*"After '08, mentally, I was over," says Phelps. "I didn't want to do it anymore. BUT I ALSO KNEW I COULDN'T STOP. So I forced myself to continue swimming."*

puts it, "Michael is the best racer in the sport. People say he did all this work or didn't do all this work. When he gets on the blocks, he's going to race."

Janet Evans, a respected swim legend who won four gold medals in 1988 and '92, says, "The guy is good when he doesn't train. He's great when he does."

After London, Phelps retired, but for less than a year. During a vacation in Cabo San Lucas in the spring of 2013, several of his buddies proposed a handicap swimming race in the hotel lap pool. That race didn't happen, but Phelps messed around alone in the pool. "Somehow I got the idea in my head," says Phelps, who was then 220 pounds, 25 pounds overweight.

## Michael PHELPS

"Maybe I'll go again." He called his mother and sisters. Debbie cried; she had always wanted to go to Rio. Michael called Bowman, who was less excited. "He called from Cabo, and he was obviously having a good time that night," says Bowman. "He said, 'I think I'm going to do one more.' I said, 'Absolutely not.' I still had a bad taste in my mouth from dealing with him [between Beijing and London]." A few months later the two had dinner at the Four Seasons hotel in Baltimore. Bowman softened. Phelps went into training again, but he put only one foot in the pool. His lifestyle didn't change significantly.

Phelps liked to gamble: mostly poker, but sometimes horses. He enjoyed drinking alcohol. Friends and family were concerned, but none, except possibly Bowman, felt that Phelps's behavior had become so extreme that he was in danger of harming himself or others. "It's not like he was spinning out of control," says Steve Skeen, a lifelong friend who works as a math teacher in the Baltimore school system. "I thought the gambling was actually calming down a little. There was definitely a lack of direction on Michael's part."

Shea says, "There were some red flags, some lifestyle changes. And if Michael wanted to be distracted, it was easy for him to find partners in crime."

Phelps says, "If I wanted to go out, there was no shortage of people I could text and find somebody to go with me."

"Stevie [Skeen] and I got those texts," says Shea. "We all did. We're nine-to-five guys, so we're not doing much during the week. Look, Michael is a stubborn guy. If he wants to do something, he's going to do it, and unfortunately he could find people who just wanted to say they were hanging out with Michael Phelps, and they didn't have his best interests in mind. There's no way Stevie or I would have let Michael drive that night. But it was what? A Monday night? Come on, Monday night. But when I got the call about the DUI, I can't say it was the most shocked I've ever been in my life."

Phelps drifted away from his family. "I would call, and he wouldn't answer," says Debbie. "I was afraid something was brewing." Flickinger, Phelps's older sister, would occasionally see her brother and says, "He would be on edge. I was concerned, but there really wasn't a way to voice that concern. I would text and get a cranky text back."

On the weekend before his arrest, Phelps had visited Johnson at her home in Southern California. They had met at the ESPY Awards in 2007, when Johnson was an ESPN intern assigned to cover Phelps. Both were 22 years old. They began dating and stayed together through the 2008 Olympics before breaking up later that year. They got together again at the end of '10 but split up a year later. Johnson sent Phelps a single text congratulating him on his London performance. In the spring of '13, Phelps reached out to Johnson and said he wanted to get back together. Again. "I said, 'No, you don't,'" says Johnson. "'You just want to do what you want to do. I don't want to waste my time.'" Phelps reached out to Johnson's mother, asking for another chance with her daughter, and in the summer of '14, Johnson flew to Baltimore for a weekend. Sitting in the Arizona State weight room as Phelps trains, Johnson struggles to explain. "We missed each other," she says. "We had both had different relationships, but we never found anybody who understood each other the way we did."

Before leaving the casino on the night of his DUI, Phelps called Johnson. Just a few minutes later he texted that he was sitting at a stoplight with a police car behind him. The next contact came an hour later, after Phelps had been arrested.

**P**EOPLE WHO have visited The Meadows say it is a lavish place, beautiful and expensive, an oasis in the desert. The splendor hides a more spartan purpose. Patients are allowed no cellphones and no Internet access. Their days are tightly scheduled, including daily group and individual therapy sessions that require a



type of introspection and sharing that had been foreign to Phelps. "When I got there, I was completely walled off," says Phelps. "I didn't want to talk to anybody."

On one of his first nights, some patients were watching a football game in a common room. There was a cutaway during the broadcast of scenes of Phelps swimming and the news that he had not only been suspended for six months by USA Swimming but also banned from participating in the 2015 world championships. "I knew I was going to get suspended," says Phelps. "I didn't know they were going to take worlds away. I didn't know that was even an option. Everybody in the room looked over at me. I said, 'Yup, that's me. Cat's out of the bag.' I stood up, walked over and got a drink of water, sat back down. 'Yup, that's me.'"

About five days into his stay, Phelps says, he began to loosen his resistance. He started to view his rehab as a competition. "I thought, O.K., I'm going to go with this. I'm here for 45 days, let's see what I can get out of it." The walls, decades in the making, began to crumble.

"I wound up uncovering a lot of things about myself that I probably knew, but I didn't want to approach," he says. "One of them was that for a long time, I saw myself as the athlete that I was, but not as a human being. I would be in sessions with complete strangers who know exactly who I am, but they don't





## SUPPORT TEAM

Phelps relies on longtime coach Bowman (left), friend and fellow swimmer Schmitt (above center), and Debbie and Johnson (right).



respect me for things I've done, but instead for who I am as a human being. I found myself feeling happier and happier. And in my group, we formed a family. We all wanted to see each other succeed. It was a new experience for me. It was tough. But it was great."

Phelps began rising at six each morning to lift weights, do push-ups and crunches, and swim in the tiny pool. "I could take about one stroke and then I was at the other side," he says. He was allowed to make phone calls each night. People on the other end—Johnson, Debbie, his sisters, Lewis—heard the voice of a man transformed. "You could tell that he had peeled back layers that had been there a long time," says Hilary.

**T**HE DEEPEST layer involved Phelps's relationship with his father. Debbie and Fred were high school sweethearts who married in 1973 when both were in their early 20s. They split up in '94 when Michael was nine and his sisters were teenagers. "For me, not having a father always there was hard," says Michael. "I had Bob and I had Peter [Carlisle], these guys who acted as father figures. But deep down, inside, it was really hard. That was something that was a struggle for me to talk about for a long time, even with friends or my mother. Getting that off my chest in therapy was this huge weight off my shoulders."

Phelps's fourth week in treatment was family week—patients can invite people to come to The Meadows and participate in therapy with them. Phelps asked Johnson, and his mother and father. "I invited my father, hoping he would come," says Phelps. "But not knowing if he would come."

Throughout his son's career, Fred Phelps had rarely done interviews. "Plenty of people called, came to my house," he says. "Looking for dirt, I guess. I just refused to talk. This was never about me. It was always about Michael." For this story, Phelps asked his father to speak to *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED*. Fred responded to a text message requesting an interview like this: "My pleasure. Happy to do it for Michael."

Fred is 65 years old, a tough man shaped by his time in two uniforms: the one he wore as a high school and Fairmont State football player, and the one he wore as a state trooper. He described a recent autumn Saturday as "the kind of day that makes you want to put the pads on again." As difficult as it was to be the adolescent son of divorced parents, it was also difficult to be the divorced father of three children. Mostly, Fred remembers a divorce that was inevitable, and then trying the best he could. "I bought a boat specifically to do things with the kids," he says. "The girls never ended up liking the boat very much, but Michael and I went fishing all the time, caught rockfish out on the Chesapeake. We went to ball games. It was wonderful. What happened after that, I couldn't tell you. I felt like Michael started to look on me as some sort of ogre. We started to separate."

Fred remarried several weeks before the Sydney Olympics and brought his new wife to the Games, a misstep. "That surprised Michael," says Debbie. "As a single mom, I tried to keep the family going, and to provide opportunities for Michael and his father to be together. One was not able to forgive, and the other one was upset."

*"Honestly, I thought, the way he was going, he was going to kill himself," says Bowman. "NOT TAKE HIS OWN LIFE, BUT SOMETHING LIKE THE DUI, BUT WORSE."*

"We went up and down," says Fred. Once, in 2001, he told Michael he would be at a swim meet in Annapolis, but he missed the meet because his shift relief couldn't make it in to work. "Michael broke a record that night, and he didn't want to hear any excuses from me," says Fred. In '08, Fred missed the Beijing Olympics because his second wife was dying of cancer. (She died in '09.) In '13, when Fred married for the third time, he and Michael were in a relatively cordial period. Fred asked Michael to be his best man. "He said no, and went in the opposite direction," says Fred. "I thought, What did I do now?"

Father and son weren't communicating at all when Michael put Fred on his invitation list for family week at The Meadows. On Oct. 27, 2014, Michael saw his father arrive and embraced him. "He said, 'I didn't know if you would come,'" says Fred. "I said, 'You're my son. Why wouldn't I come?'"

There were things that Michael needed to say. "I felt abandoned," he says. "I have an amazing mother and two amazing sisters. But I would like to have a father in my life, and I've been carrying that around for 20 years. That's a long time. It does something to you. To a kid, especially. Right now I'd like to be able to talk to my father and have him be able to talk to me. Is my family perfect? Far from it. My parents had issues

## Michael PHELPS

where they thought it was healthy to split. It wasn't ideal. It wasn't easy. But what we went through as kids made us as strong as we are. And now my father and I communicate. It's not fixed. You don't fix something like that. But it's better." Fred has embraced a second chance to be his son's father and clings to it. "I have a better sense of who Michael is now," he says. "And I think he knows I'm not an ogre." At the end of our interview, he says, "The one thing I would so deeply ask of you is, please don't write anything that would harm what my son and I have now. Please."

Michael emerged from rehab with a fresh hunger for life. "I was just happy," he says. Cynics will wait to see if it takes. It's been more than a year, unabated. He continues with therapy, both in person and via phone. Friends say he has become more spiritual. Last March he went to Pueblo, Colo., for the funeral of Johnson's grandmother, and near the end of the 45-mile drive back to the Olympic Training Center, John Legend's "All of Me" came on. It's their song. Phelps pulled over, proposed to Johnson, gave her the ring they had picked out and tackled her into the spring snow. They will be married after the Olympics.

*"I wound up uncovering a lot of things about myself. For a long time, I SAW MYSELF AS THE ATHLETE THAT I WAS, BUT NOT AS A HUMAN BEING."*

Phelps has also drawn strength from close friend, training partner and 2008 and '12 Olympian Allison Schmitt, who last spring went public with her fight against depression.

Phelps guarantees that Rio will be his last Olympics. Tokyo 2020? "No shot," he says. He remains active in outside ventures: the Michael Phelps Foundation, which he launched with his \$1 million bonus from Beijing—to promote water safety and promote swimming as a healthy activity—has attracted more than 15,000 participants in the U.S. and around the world. In '14 he founded the MP line of swimwear and equipment. He has many other sponsors, including Baltimore-based apparel company Under Armour. Also: "We want to have a family," he says. "We want to have kids."

**E**IGHT LANES of swimmers are grinding through an evening interval workout at ASU's Mona Plummer Aquatic Complex; Phelps is in the second lane from the wall, doing a series of 10 50-yard breaststroke repeats with decreasing rest between the intervals, until the final two 50s are done essentially on top of each other. Two other swimmers are also doing breaststroke, three are swimming butterfly and two are swimming freestyle. Bowman is at the side of the pool with strength and conditioning coach Keenan Robinson, who has worked with Phelps for many years. It is a tough, high-quality session. After the 10th repeat Phelps asks Robinson to test his lactate level, which is commonly done to measure an athlete's recovery time. Bowman tells Phelps to swim the 500-meter cooldown and then get his lactate level tested.

Phelps shouts at Bowman, "Sure, I guess we don't need accurate stats.



It's bulls---. I'd like to see exactly when my lactate clears. Now we'll never know."

Bowman: "Yeah, think how good you could have been if you hadn't had to overcome all this bad coaching. You know, we'd hate to keep doing the things that produced 22 Olympic medals."

Phelps: "Maybe we'd have 24." (In addition to a fourth in the London 400 IM, Phelps finished fifth in his first race, in 2000.)

Bowman: "The first one you screwed up. You went out too fast."

Phelps (now laughing): "O.K., I'll take that one, but you get the 400 IM from London."

Bowman: "O.K., fair. I'll take that one."

The exchange had started with a real edginess and dissolved into comedy, chops-busting between old friends. They have the type of relationship that is unique to individual sports: Bowman is both coach and employee. (Phelps pays him.) But both men have been rejuvenated by Phelps's recent transformation.

"I've seen the ups and downs with Michael," says Kalisz, who has been training with Phelps since 2009. "Sometimes you would see the passion, sometimes not. Now you see that guy every day."

Bowman never expected to see that guy again. And last spring, even as Phelps trained relentlessly,



his workout times lagged. “It had been so long since Michael and I did this the right way,” says Bowman, “I wondered if maybe I had forgotten how to do it.” Three weeks before last summer’s nationals Phelps swam five 150-meter butterfly repeats, a grueling workout that he had never done before. “He was always afraid to do it,” says Bowman. This time Kalisz crushed Phelps, but Phelps finished it. A week later Bowman put Phelps through a series of 100-meter butterflies, and each repetition was to be faster than the one before it. Phelps swam his last 100 in 50-meter splits of 29 and 27, one of the best sessions of his life. The San Antonio breakthrough followed.

Bowman has modified Phelps’s program to accommodate his advanced (swimming) age and his dodgy (but structurally sound) right shoulder. Instead of swimming 85,000 meters a week, he swims 50,000–60,000, still high-volume but not as high as it once was. He needs—and is allowed—more recovery from tough sessions. “My goal now is to have the speed and quality,” says Bowman, “but make sure he can recover fast enough to keep it continuous.” When Phelps was younger, he lived largely on his cardiovascular engine and stroke technique. At age 30, and with lower training volume, the engine is a little less potent. (After a recent 3,000-yard ladder session Phelps’s pulse rate dropped more slowly than the younger swimmers’ in the group; Phelps shouted, “Old man can’t get the heart rate down!”) But he is stronger and gets more power from each stroke, a different way of getting to the same place.

Phelps’s greatest gift now sits atop his shoulders. He no longer performs to fulfill historical imperatives but for his own, rediscovered joy. He stares across an Arizona street in the midday sun. Rio is nine months away; expectations will come knocking soon, but now he is prepared. “I’m back to being the little kid who once said anything is possible,” says Phelps. “You’re going to see a different me than you saw in any of the other Olympics.”

He digests the words and then enforces them: “That’s the way I see it.” His head bobs slowly up and down. A familiar face. But a new man. □

© 2015 Kraft Foods



**NO** ARTIFICIAL PRESERVATIVES  
**+ NO** ADDED NITRATES OR NITRITES\*  
**+ NO** ADDED MSG  
**YES!**



It's Yes Food. It's Oscar Mayer.

\*Except those naturally occurring in celery juice.



Try our  
**NEW**  
 line of  
 Selects Sausage.



# Funds And Games

→ BY MICHAEL ROSENBERG

**LAST WEEK WE** learned that the Department of Defense shelled out millions for “paid patriotism” displays at sporting events over the past four years, most of it to NFL teams. You can certainly understand why the military wants to be associated with the NFL, which has enjoyed such great public relations lately. But the Department of Defense’s biggest windfall, for \$879,000, went to the Falcons, which reminds me of a fun trivia question:

Q. Who had the worst defense in the NFL last year?

A. The Falcons.

After Atlanta, the DOD paid the most to the Patriots: \$700,000, though I assume that is nothing compared with what New England gets from the CIA. Some would call this wasteful government spending, but we know that the billionaires who own NFL teams would never worry about that kind of thing. You know the old saying: God, family and country, and good luck getting the first two to pay for anything.

As somebody who has stood and applauded troops at games, I was surprised to learn that those on-field tributes were nothing more than simple business transactions. I was also surprised NFL executives did not try to get a higher bid from another country’s military. In response to the controversy, commissioner Roger Goodell has promised to reimburse the government for any “inappropriate payments.” The word *inappropriate* gives Goodell enough wiggle room to do the electric slide with the owners of all 32 teams, their lawyers and their butlers. But let’s assume the league returns all the money. How will it make up the lost revenue? I humbly suggest playing more games in London, and also billing oncologists for all those pink towels and wristbands promoting breast cancer awareness. I know that last one may seem a bit crass, but there are defensive ends to pay and profit goals to reach. Together, we make money.

The NFL was certainly not the only league to take military money; 10 teams in MLB, eight in the NBA and six in the NHL also were paid. The NFL was just the biggest pig at the trough. Anyway, professional teams’ contracts with the military are not even the strangest

What’s  
more  
surprising:  
that the  
defense  
department  
paid for  
patriotic  
displays,  
or that the  
NFL didn’t  
try to get  
a higher  
bid from  
another  
country’s  
military?

  
What’s  
the worst  
in-stadium  
marketing  
campaign  
you’ve seen?  
Join the  
discussion on  
Twitter by  
using  
#SIPointAfter  
and following  
@Rosenberg\_Mike

sponsorship agreements in sports. For many years, our state universities have paid for players to wear their school colors, in an arrangement often referred to as “college football.” How do you explain that?

Perhaps this paid patriotism is the start of a trend. With that underwriting program out in the open, why stop there? Think of the possibilities: Teams could collect canned-food donations for the homeless, sell a third of the items for profit, donate the other two thirds to those in need, then take the empties back and charge the Sierra Club to recycle them. Ask not what you can do for the environment; ask what the environment can do for you. Also, teams often get police escorts to games, and until now police have not paid for the privilege. How many fans would love (read: *pay*) to join the caravan, speeding on the highway, lights flashing, next to a real-life NFL team?

General George Patton once said, “A pint of sweat will save a gallon of blood,” but why take his word for it? Let’s make sure we have enough blood by starting blood drives at every major arena: \$14 a pint—surely if you can afford to lose a pint of blood, you won’t mind parting with \$14. In exchange you’ll get a souvenir cup with your favorite team’s logo and the words I GAVE BLOOD on it, for an extra \$12. It will impress your friends and neighbors, who probably also have veins.

This might all seem silly, disgusting or pointless. You might think that the Pentagon could have simply asked publicly for teams to honor their troops for free. Would teams really have said no?

Fair question, but I refuse to ask it. I think pro teams should cash in all day, starting with “The Star-Spangled Banner.” I applaud the financial efforts of our fine franchise owners—none of whom paid me to write that last sentence, as far as you know. □



SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (ISSN 0038-822X) is published weekly, with an extra issue in February and skipped issues in January, February, April and July, by Time Inc. Principal Office: 225 Liberty Street, New York, NY 10281. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40110178. Return undeliverable Canada addresses through the UPM process: GST #888381621R7001. U.S. Subscriptions: \$65 for one year, SUBSCRIBERS: If the postal service alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within two years. Your bank may provide updates to the card information we have on file. You may opt out of this service at any time. POSTMASTER: Send all UAA to CFS. See DMV 707/412.5. NON-POSTAL AND MILITARY FACILITIES: send address corrections to Post Office Box 62121, Tampa, FL 33662-2121. MAILING LIST: We make a portion of our mailing list available to reputable firms. If you would prefer that we not include your name, please call or write us. ©2015 TIME INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. REPRODUCTION IN WHOLE OR IN PART WITHOUT PERMISSION IS PROHIBITED. SPORTS ILLUSTRATED IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK OF TIME INC. CUSTOMER SERVICE AND SUBSCRIPTIONS: For 24/7 service, please use our website: [www.SI.com/customerservice](http://www.SI.com/customerservice) You can also call 1-800-528-5000 or write to SI at P.O. Box 62120, Tampa, FL 33662-2120.





Robert Graham®

[www.robertgraham.us](http://www.robertgraham.us)

CALIFORNIA | CONNECTICUT | FLORIDA | GEORGIA | NEVADA  
NEW JERSEY | NEW YORK | TEXAS | WASHINGTON



*Ford* MUSTANG



Go Further 